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LENI LEOTI

OR,

ADVENTURES IN THE FAR WEST.

BY

EMERSON BENNETT.

PHILADELPHIA:

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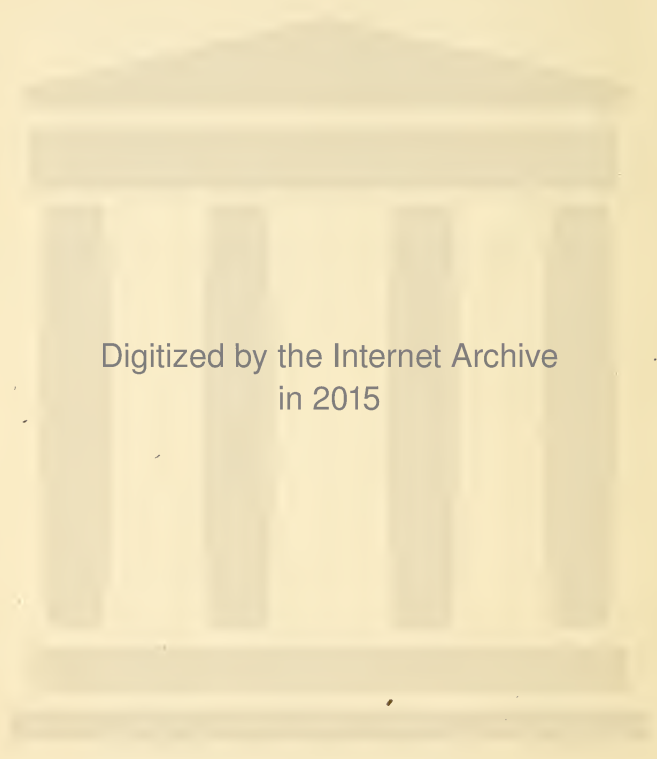
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LENI LEOTI

OR,

ADVENTURES IN THE FAR WEST.

A

SEQUEL TO "THE PRAIRIE FLOWER."

BY EMERSON BENNETT.

AUTHOR OF "PRAIRIE FLOWER," "CLARA MORELAND," "BRIDE OF THE WILDERNESS,"

"KATE CLARENDON," "THE BORDER ROVER," "HEIRESS OF BELLEFONTE,"

"THE PHANTOM OF THE FOREST," "THE PIONEER'S DAUGHTER,"

"VIOLA," "THE FORGED WILL," "ELLEN NORBURY."

"LENI LEOTI," by Emerson Bennett, is a remarkable book. It is brimful of life, love, passion, sentiment, humor and pathos; and its glowing descriptions, romantic incidents, daring adventures, fearful perils, thrilling exploits, dreadful accidents, and hairbreadth escapes—all run through and interweave with it a deep, ingenious and intricate plot. The scene is on and over the broad prairies and Rocky Mountains of the mighty West, before the conquering tread of civilization had entered upon their vast solitudes, when roving tribes of Indians, and a few half-civilized hunters and trappers, traversed the lonely region, literally carrying their lives in their hands. We feel no hesitation in placing Mr. Bennett among the best writers, taken all in all, of any in this country in the particular field of literature which he has chosen. In all that he writes there seems to be an irresistible charm, holding the reader spellbound from the beginning to the end.

PHILADELPHIA:

T. B. PETERSON & BROTHERS;

306 CHESTNUT STREET.

EMERSON BENNETT,

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"The Prairie Flower" and its sequel "Leni Leoti," by Emerson Bennett, are indeed remarkable books, and they contain all the elements for present popularity and enduring fame. They are brim-full of life, love, passion, sentiment, humor and pathos; and their glowing descriptions, romantic incidents, daring adventures, fearful perils, thrilling exploits, dreadful accidents, and hair-breadth escapes—all run through and interweave with a deep, ingenious and intricate plot. The scene is on and over the Broad Prairies and Rocky Mountains of the Mighty West, before the conquering tread of civilization had entered upon their vast solitudes, when roving tribes of Indians, and a few half-civilized hunters and trappers, traversed the lonely region, literally carrying their lives in their hands.

We feel no hesitation in placing Mr. Bennett among the foremost of American writers. Of course we do not include metaphysics, nor history, nor philosophy (although it must be confessed that his writings prove his perfect familiarity with each), but we mean that he is the best writer, taken all in all, of any in this country in the particular field of literature which he has chosen. There are doubtless many writers who excel him in some minor points—but, taken as a whole, his works are unrivalled.

In all that he writes there seems to be an irresistible charm, holding the reader spell-bound from the beginning to the end. That this gift is natural and not acquired, we assume from reading some of his earlier productions. We well remember the eagerness with which "The Prairie Flower" and "Leni Leoti," were sought after and devoured upon their first appearance. Everybody read them—everybody talked about them—and, for a time, not to have seen or not to have read "The Prairie Flower," and "Leni Leoti," was to acknowledge yourself guilty of unpardonable ignorance.

As a proof of the public appreciation of "The Prairie Flower," and "Leni Leoti," we have only to state that over 100,000 copies of each book, of the original octavo edition, were sold, and that both works having long been out of print, the Publishers now present this new, handsome and cheap edition, of both works.

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LENI LEOTI.

CHAPTER I.

KEEPING MY SECRET.



It was the first day of June, in the year of our Lord 1843. Already the earth felt the genial air of summer, and looked as smiling as a gay maiden in her teens. The blade had covered the ground with a carpet of matchless green ; amid which, their lovely faces half concealed, bright flowers of a hundred varieties peeped modestly forth, to render the landscape enchanting, giving their sweet breath to a southern breeze that softly stole over them. The trees in every direction were in full foliage, and already among them could be seen green bunches of embryo fruits. It was in fact a delightful day, a delightful season of the year, and a delightful scene upon which I gazed, with feelings, alas ! that had more in them of sadness than joy.

I was still in Oregon City ; yet two months had flown since on the banks of the romantic Willamette I had offered my hand, heart and fortune to Lilian Huntly, and had been by her accepted, only to find the nuptial day prolonged to an indefinite period—the return of my friend and her brother.

I did not describe my feelings then to the reader, but they had really been very painful. I had deceived Lilian and her mother, I knew, in leading them to hope, even, for the return of Charles Huntly ; and I felt stung to the very soul as one guilty of a crime.

What should I do? had often since been my mental question. Should I avow all to Lilian and make her wretched by destroying all hope of ever seeing Charles again? or should I still let her remain in blissful ignorance of his fate, and look in vain to the future for the consummation of her ardent wishes? It was a painful dilemma. The first was the most open, upright and straightforward manner of settling the matter, most undoubtedly; and conscience and a first impulse had urged me to it; but then a doubt in my own mind that he was really dead—a faint, a very faint hope that he might sometime return to his friends—a loathing to inflict a wound upon the affectionate heart I loved, which time alone could heal—perhaps cause needless suffering to one who had already suffered enough—had restrained me; and between a desire to do right, and a fear to do wrong, I had done nothing but muse abstractedly.

Thus days had rolled on, one after another, and the end of May had found me as undecided as ever; and though daily basking in the smiles of Lilian, and listening to her artless words of musical sweetness, not even a hint had I ever thrown out regarding what I knew of her brother.

Often had she mentioned him, but always in a way to denote she scarcely had a doubt of seeing him the coming summer; and the thought that she must be disappointed, had tended to make me sad and melancholy.

At last I resolved to tell her all; and for this purpose I invited her one morning to our usual stroll on the banks of the Willamette.

The day was fine, and everything around beautiful.

We took our way directly to the falls, and paused upon a bluff immediately over the rolling, sparkling waters.

This bluff, which is the bank of the stream at Oregon City, varies from twenty to eighty feet in height, and, running back, forms the level upon which the town was then just beginning to be laid out.

The scene was charming, notwithstanding it was in the wilderness. A beautiful forest stretched away on

either hand ; below us rolled the river, roaring over the falls ; and on the opposite side rose similar bluffs, and another pleasant forest. It seemed a place fitted for the communion of lovers, and here Lilian and I had whiled away our happiest hours. Here I had offered her my hand, here I had been accepted, and of course the scene could not but recall pleasant associations.

Hither then we strayed ; and as we paused above the bright river, Lilian exclaimed, with a look of joy :

"Oh, it will be so delightful when Charles joins us ! Do you know what I have determined on, Frank ?"

"Surely not," I answered.

"Do you see that level yonder (pointing down the stream), which sets off so pleasantly below this, shaded by those tall, old trees ?"

"Ay, I see, Lilian."

"Well, there I have planned having such a picnic, on the day when—when we—"

She paused and blushed, and glanced timidly at me, as if expecting I would complete the sentence.

I did not, for my mind was busy with sad thoughts.

"Now," thought I, "is the time to tell her all."

But how should I begin to pain her ?

I was uneasy, and felt miserable, and doubtless looked as I felt, for the next moment she exclaimed, in some alarm :

"Why, Francis, what is the matter ? You look so pale ! Has anything happened ?"

"Nothing new."

"What then ? You always look so pained when I allude to brother Charles ! Surely there must be some cause ! Have you kept anything hidden from me ? Speak, Francis ! You left him well, did you not ?" and she grasped my arm, and looked earnestly in my face.

"I did, Lilian."

"Well, what then ? You must have no secrets from me now, you know."

I would have to tell her, I thought, and there could never be a better time than this.

"Lilian," I began, and my voice trembled as I spoke :
"Lilian, I—"

"What ho, my lovers! are you here?" shouted a merry voice. "I thought I should find you here;" and the next moment we were joined by the gay, light-hearted Eva Mortimer. "In the name of humanity," she said, as she came bounding up to us, "what makes you both look so pale? Not making love again, I hope!" and she ended with a ringing laugh, which, however pleasant it might have sounded at another time, now jarred most discordantly with the feelings of both.

"No, not exactly making love, Miss Mortimer," I answered, turning to her with a forced smile, and, if truth must be owned, rather rejoiced than otherwise that she had broken off what must have proved a painful interview.

"Well," she rejoined, playfully, brushing back her dark ringlets with one of the prettiest, white, dimpled hands in the world, "I am glad to hear that; for I feared, from your sober looks, you were either getting into a lover's quarrel, or going over a nameless scene that was enacted here some weeks ago;" and she looked meaningly, first at Lilian, who colored deeply, and then at me, who I fancied stood it like a philosopher. "Come," she added, in the same gay tone, "I have use for you both all day. We—that is I, and my good mother, and yours, Lilian, and some others—have decided on going to see a beautiful lake, which, we are told, ornaments a certain fern bluff that you see away yonder, some half a mile back of this magnificent city. City indeed!" she continued, with a curl of the lip. "Why, it might be stolen from the suburbs of Boston, or any other place of note, and never be missed. But mother would come in spite of me, and when she takes a notion into her head she must carry it out. She wishes herself back now, and I join her with all my heart; but, heighho! I suppose I shall have to spend my days here, for I see no means of getting away. But I will tease her, though—I am pledged to that—and that will be some comfort, and save me dying of *ennui*. Oregon City! Umph! I thought it would turn out to be woods before I came, and I told her so—but she would not believe me. Come, Mr. Leighton, don't be standing there looking so sober!

nor you, my bonnie Lilian. I am going to have you along ; and if I don't make you laugh, why, I will turn in and cry myself. Only to think of being here without a lover ! It don't matter with you, Lilian, for you have got one ; but think of me—in pity do ! Nobody here but some thick-headed rustics that don't know how to make love. I wish your brother would come, Lilian—I am dying to see him ! He saved my life, you know ; and so I am bound, by all the rules of novels, to fall in love with him out of pure gratitude."

"You will not need gratitude, I fancy," added I, with a sigh at the thought of him, "should you ever be fortunate enough to see him—for he is a noble fellow, and one I think to your liking."

"Ah !" she sighed ; "you need not tell me he is a noble fellow—for none but such would have risked his life as he did for a stranger. I have been in love with him ever since I heard about it, though I had long ago given up all hope of ever seeing him."

"And he will be ready, I will vouch for him, to reciprocate the tender feeling."

"Do you think so ?" she said, slightly blushing, and her eyes sparkling. "Oh, that will be so romantic ! and I love romance dearly. I will have him down upon his knees at every frown ; and I will frown twenty times a day, just to have him down upon his knees. Now that will be making love to some purpose, eh ?" And giving vent to a ringing laugh, she added, taking my arm : "Come, don't let us keep the good people waiting, or they may get off the notion, and I would not miss seeing the lake for a costly ruby."

My design of telling a sad tale was thus broken off, and, as I said before, I was not sorry for it.

Arm in arm with the two I returned to what was denominated the village, Eva the while chatting away gayly, flying from one thing to another, but ever adroitly returning to Charles Huntly, showing that he now occupied no small share of her thoughts.

CHAPTER II.

RESOLVE TO SEEK MY FRIEND.



FROM the conversation recorded in the preceding chapter, it will be seen that Eva Mortimer was a very different being from Lilian Huntly ; and as she is destined to figure somewhat conspicuously in these pages, I consider the present a good opportunity to describe her.

In person Eva Mortimer was slightly above medium, with a form well developed, and a bust of rare beauty. Her complexion was clear and dark, though scarcely sufficient to entitle her to the appellation of brunette. Her soft, hazel eyes, shaded by silken lashes, were very expressive, and could look love languishingly, or sparkle with mirth, anger, or any of the passions of impulse. Her features were regular and very prepossessing, with a nose slightly aquiline, and mouth and lips as tempting as one would care to look upon.

Her disposition accorded with her looks. At heart she was open and generous, with a desire to please and be pleased, let fortune smile or frown. Her spirits were almost ever buoyant, and it required a strong cause to depress them. Very different from some, she could not easily be brought to consider this bright earth as only a graveyard, and herself a mournful inhabitant, ever stalking among tombs. She did not believe in storm, and cloud, and dreariness, so much as in an open sky, sunshine, cheerfulness and joy. It would have required great depth of reasoning to convince her that God had placed man here expressly to mope out his days in gloom and sorrow, either real or imaginary. She did not fancy the dark side of the picture ; and, full of the poetry of an ardent temperament, there was to her in the sunshine, the breeze, the leaf, the blade, the flower, the mount, the vale, the storm, and in fact in everything of nature, something to excite joy rather than sadness. Whatever her fortune,

she took care to make the best of it and not repine. She was lively even to gayety, and could rattle on for hours in a light, frolicsome strain, calculated to mislead such as looked not below the mere surface ; but those who judged Eva Mortimer by this, judged wrongly ; for beneath was a heart as warm, as earnest, as pure, as true, as ever beat in the breast of woman. This was the drift, the foam, that floated along on the strong current of a noble mind.

Had you seen and listened to her in her merry moods, you would have thought perhaps she had no mind above trifles, or beyond the mere present ; that she was vain and coquettish to a fault ; that she would take no delight in serious meditation ; and yet you could not easily have erred more in judgment.

I have seen her alone, in the night, gazing at the stars, when she thought no human eye beheld her. I have watched her musing over a flower, which she patiently dissected, as if to lay bare its mysteries ; over the pebbles which she had gathered in some ramble ; over a leaf, a blade of grass ; in fact over whatever had chanced in her path ; and all in a way to show her possessed of *mind*, and that of the highest order.

There were but few in her present locality who really knew Eva Mortimer, and none who seemed to appreciate her as did Lilian.

In their short acquaintance, these two bright beings had become *friends* ; not in the cold, unmeaning term of the world—but friends sincere and true, and bound by a tie beyond the power of death itself to sever. Like the magnet and the needle had they come together, to be held by attractions peculiar to themselves. To each other their hearts were ever open ; and the joys and sorrows of the one, were the joys and sorrows of the other. They talked together, walked together, read together (each had brought a few choice books), sang together, and both ever seemed happier on all occasions for the other's presence. They were nearly of the same age, of different temperaments, and united like the different strings of a harp to bring forth nothing but music. In short, they loved each other—not with the evanescent love of fiery

passion, which burns and freezes alternately—but with that deeper and truer love which springs from admiration of, and dependence on, in a measure, the qualities we do not possess ourselves. It was a holy love—the love of two fair maidens just budding into womanhood.

Of the early history of Eva Mortimer I at this time knew but little, and this I had gleaned from Lillian.

Her mother, a woman between forty and fifty years of age, was a native of England, of wealthy parentage, but not of noble birth.

Some twenty-five years before the date of these events, she had clandestinely married a French exile, apparently without name or fortune, rather for the love of romance, and because she was strongly opposed by her friends, than for any real affection which she had felt toward the individual himself.

This proceeding had so incensed her parents, that they had cast her off; but, unlike most parents in such cases, unwilling she should suffer too much, they had offered her a life annuity that would keep her above want, on condition that she should quit the country immediately and return to it no more.

To this she had readily assented; and shortly after, with her husband, had embarked for America, and had finally settled at Quebec, in Canada, where for several years they had continued to live together—though not, it must be confessed, in the most harmonious manner.

Being rather headstrong and self-willed, and withal possessed of an independence, Madame Mortimer had sought to have everything her own way, and had not scrupled occasionally to make her husband feel that he was her debtor for every luxury he enjoyed.

Of a proud spirit, and a temper somewhat irritable, he had not displayed any too much Christian humility, meekness and resignation, and many a bitter quarrel had been the consequence.

Time rolled on, and at the end of five years she had given birth to female twins. Both had been hoping for a male heir; and consequently this event, instead of mending, had rather served to widen, the breach. Quarrel had then succeeded quarrel; and as love was wanting to

harmonize two opposing spirits, it had at last been found necessary to separate.

Two years had so passed, when one morning Mortimer had come into the presence of his wife, with a letter in his hand, and had abruptly announced his intention of leaving her.

"As you like," Madame Mortimer had coolly replied.

Mortimer had turned and left her, nor had she ever beheld him since.

The night following, the twin sister of Eva had disappeared ; and the most diligent inquiries, together with the offer of a large reward, had failed in restoring her to her anxious mother.

The effect of this upon Madame Mortimer had proved very severe—for she loved both her children dearly—and a nervous fever had followed and nearly cost her her life.

Soon after this she had received news of her father's death ; and that, having repented of his rashness, he had left her a rich legacy, with permission to return to England.

To England therefore she went ; and there had remained, superintending the education of Eva, until a desire for travel had brought her once more to this country, whither she had come in company with her daughter and a wealthy American lady, whose acquaintance had been made across the water, and who had subsequently introduced her into New York society, simply as Madame Mortimer, without a word of explanation, this being at her own earnest request.

Thus it was, as I have before mentioned, that none who had met her in society had been able to learn who she was or whence she came, and this had doubtless added to her popularity.

This was all I had been able to gather from Lilian ; and all, in fact, she knew ; and this had been picked up at different times, from remarks that had escaped the lips of Eva in her more communicative moods.

In person, Madame Mortimer was large, with a full, handsome countenance, expressive, black eyes, and a bearing dignified and queen-like. At heart she was

kind and affectionate ; and doubtless, had she been properly mated, would have made an exemplary wife. Her passions, when excited, were strong even to violence, with a temper haughty and unyielding to an equal, but subdued and mild to an inferior. She loved passionately, and hated bitterly. With her, as a general thing, there was no medium. She liked or disliked, and carried both to extremes. She was a woman of strong mind, much given to thought and reflection, an acute observer of everything around her, and just sufficiently eccentric to throw the freshness of originality over all she said or did. She would do what she thought was proper, without regard to the opinion of others, or to what the world would say. She had resolved on a journey to Oregon, not for any particular purpose, but merely to carry out a whim and see the country. She had done both, was dissatisfied with her present locality, and now designed returning to the States at the first favorable opportunity.

Of the fate of her brother, Lilian still remained ignorant ; for, after the interruption of Eva, I could never summon enough moral courage to again attempt the sad narration.

As time rolled on, I became more and more depressed in spirits, and more perplexed as to the course I should pursue.

It was not impossible, I began to reason, that Charles Huntly might be living ; and the more I pondered on this, the more I was inclined to believe it the case.

He had been lost mysteriously, in a part of the world notoriously infested with robbers and Indians. If captured by the former, there was no argument against the supposition that he had been plundered and sold into slavery. If by the latter, might he not have been adopted by some tribe, and now be a prisoner ? In either case, was I not in duty bound to go in quest of him ? and, if found, to rescue him from a horrible doom, either by ransom or force ?

"At all events," I said to myself, "I can but fail, and *may* succeed."

On leaving home, I had supplied myself with a large

amount of gold to meet all contingencies, and but little of this had been expended. I could, perhaps, engage a party, for a reasonable sum, to accompany me; and this, after duly weighing all the circumstances, I now decided to attempt. I would let Lilian and the others suppose I had gone home, and that I should probably return with Charles Huntly.

Having settled the matter in my own mind, I resolved on immediate action, and for this purpose called Teddy aside to communicate my intention.

"Teddy," I began, gravely, "did you love your former master?"

"Me masther?" repeated the Irishman, with a look of curious inquiry; "and sure of who is't ye're spaking, yer honor?"

"Of Charles Huntly."

"Did I love him, is't? Faith, and does a snapping turtle love to bite, or a drunkard to drink, that ye ax me that now? Love him? Troth, and was he livin', I'd go to the ind of the world and jump off, jist to plase him, and so I would."

"It may be, Teddy, you can serve him more effectually than by a proceeding so dangerous."

"Sarve him, is't! Och, now, I'd be afther knowing of that same!"

"I have taken a fancy into my head that he is living."

"Mother of Moses! ye don't say the likes!" exclaimed the Hibernian, holding up both hands in astonishment. "Ye's joking, sure, your honor?"

"No, Teddy, I am serious as a judge. I have always had some faint doubts of his death, and now these doubts have grown strong enough to induce me to set off in search of him;" and I proceeded to give my reasons.

"Ah, sure," said Teddy, as I concluded, "this is a happy day for me mother's son, if nothing comes on't but ~~no~~ arthing wid—wid—"

"But, Teddy, I had designed taking you along."

"And sure, Misther Leighton, isn't it going I is wid yees now? D'ye think I'd be afther staying behind, like a spalpeen, and yees away afther Misther Huntly? pace

to his ashes ! barring that he's got no ashes at all, at all, but is raal flish and blood, like your own bonny silf, that's one of the kindest gintlemen as iver wore out shoe-maker's fixings and made the tailor blush wid modesty for the ixcellent fit of his coat !"

"But you spoke of parting, Teddy ?"

"Ah, troth, and yees a gallant yoursilf, your honor, and not sae it was a wee bit of a famale parthing I's min-tioning, jist ?"

"Female parting ! I do not understand you."

Here Teddy scratched his head, and looked not a little confused.

"Why, ye sae, your honor," he replied, hesitatingly, "ye sae the womens (Heaven bliss their darling sowls !) is all lovable crathurs ; and it's mesilf that likes to maat 'em wheriver I goes ; but somehow, your honor, a chap's like to be thinking of one, more in particular by raason of his nathur ; and that's the case wid mesilf now and Molly Stubbs, that lives yonder, barring that it's hardly living at all that she's a-doin' in this wild counthry."

The truth flashed upon me at once. One of the settlers, who had come here in advance of my friends, had a large, buxom, rosy-cheeked daughter of eighteen, who went by the euphonious appellation of Molly Stubbs—sometimes, Big Molly—and I now remembered having seen Teddy idling about the premises, though at the time I had no suspicion of the real cause.

"And so, Teddy, you have been making love, eh ?"

"Divil a bit, your honor."

"How ? what ?"

"No ! ye sae it was all made to me hand, and I've ounly been acting it out, jist."

"Aha ! exactly. And so you think you can part with your *belle ami*, eh ?"

"And sure if it's Molly Stubbs you maan by that Lathin, it's mesilf that can say the farewell handsome, now."

"Well, make your parting short, and then see to having the horses got ready, for in less three hours we must be in our saddles."

With this I turned away ; and with slow steps, and a

heart by no means the lightest, I sought the residence of Lilian, to communicate the unpleasant intelligence that in a few minutes we must part, perhaps to meet no more in this world.

CHAPTER III.

THE SAD FAREWELLS.



S I neared the residence of Mrs. Huntly and Lilian (which had also been mine for some months), for the purpose of bidding my friends another long adieu, I heard the merry voice and ringing laugh of Eva Mortimer.

Another time this would have been music to my ears ; but now my spirits were greatly depressed, and I was not in a mood to appreciate it.

The cabin—it would scarcely bear a more exalted title—seemed surrounded with an air of gloom. It was as good as any, better than most, which formed the village of Oregon City ; but yet what a place to be the abode of those who had been used all their lives to the luxurious mansions of wealth ! and I could not avoid making a comparison between the condition of the tenants now, and when I had approached to bid them farewell some three years before—nor of thinking with what Christian-like resignation they had borne, and still bore, their misfortunes.

Their present little dwelling was built of unhewn logs, whose crevices were filled with clay, had a thatched roof, puncheon floors, and three apartments. One of these had been assigned to Teddy and myself, another to Lilian and her mother, and the third answered the treble uses of parlor, sitting-room and kitchen. A few beds and bedding, a table, one or two chairs, together with a few benches, and the most common household utensils, comprised the principal furniture.

And this was the abode of the lovely and once wealthy heiress, Lilian Huntly ! And she could seem contented here ! What a happy spirit, to adapt itself to all circumstances—to blend itself, if I may so express it, with every fortune !

With this reflection I crossed the threshold, and beheld Lilian and Eva in gay conversation, and Mrs. Huntly seated by the table, perusing a book.

Both the young ladies turned to me as I entered, and Eva at once exclaimed :

“So, Mr. Francis, you have just come in time—we have it all settled.”

“May I inquire what ?” returned I, gravely.

“May you inquire what ?” she repeated, with a playful curl of the lip. “Did you ever see such a starch, ministerial look, Lilian ?—as grave is he as a sexton. Why one would suppose all his friends were dead, and he had come to invite us to the funeral. Heigh-ho ! if ever I get a lover, he shall wear no such look as that ; if he do, it will be at the risk of having his hair combed and powdered, I assure you.”

“But I have reason for looking grave,” I replied.

“Eh ! what !” cried Eva, changing instantly her whole expression and manner. “Surely you have no bad news for us ?” and she approached and laid her hand upon my arm, with a troubled look ; while Lilian sunk down upon a seat, as if she had some sad foreboding, and Mrs. Huntly turned her eyes upon me inquiringly.

“Give yourselves no alarm,” I hastened to reply. “I have only come to say that we must separate for a time.”

“Indeed !” exclaimed Eva, looking seriously.

“You have heard tidings of Charles ?” added Mrs. Huntly.

I glanced at Lilian ; but she said not a word, though all color had forsaken her features.

“No, I have not heard from Charles,” I rejoined, in answer to Mrs. Huntly ; “but I presume I shall ere I return.”

‘Good Heavens! then you are going far?’ cried Eva, in astonishment.

‘I contemplate making a journey to the East, and may meet Charles on the way—in which case I shall return at once—otherwise I may be absent all summer.’

‘Why, Francis, what has made you resolve thus so suddenly?’ inquired Mrs. Huntly. ‘How are we to do without you? I thought—(she paused and glanced toward Lilian, who had turned her head aside and seemed deeply affected)—that—that—you intended to pass the summer with us?’

‘Cruel man!’ said Eva, in a whisper; ‘how can you leave the sweetest being on earth? Oh, you men!’ And then she continued aloud: ‘I wish we were all going with you! Can you not take us all along?’

‘Why, I fear it would not be safe.’

‘As safe as it is here, I am certain. Surely we could not be more than killed if we went; and who knows but some of these Indians, that are in the habit of visiting our great city here, may take a notion we have lived long enough, and so murder us all—or marry us, which would be quite as bad! But whoever knew a gentleman gallant enough to do what was asked of him? Ah! I see—you don’t even listen now; your thoughts are all with somebody else; and so I will retire. Let me know when it is over, as I wish to bid you adieu;’ and she darted out of the room.

Mrs. Huntly was on the point of interrogating me further; but perceiving, by a sign from Lilian, that the latter wished to see me alone, she made some excuse, and went into an adjoining apartment. The moment she had disappeared, Lilian sprung up and flew into my arms.

‘Is this true, Francis?’ she exclaimed. ‘Are you really going to leave us?’

‘I fear I must for a time,’ I said, in a not very firm voice.

‘A long time then,’ sighed the fair girl; ‘a long time if you are going East. Oh, Francis, I did not think we should part so soon! What have you heard? Soine-

thing, surely—for you have never intimated this before—and you would not deceive one who loves you?”

This was said so touchingly, with such *naïveté*, that for a time I only replied by pressing her more closely to my heart, and imprinting a kiss upon her quivering lips.

“I cannot tell my Lilian everything,” I at length made answer. “Suffice, that I have important reasons for going; and sometime, God willing, you shall know all. My resolution to leave was formed to-day, and to-day we must part.”

“To-day?” she gasped; and I felt her whole form quiver like a reed shaken by the wind. “Oh, no! not to-day, Francis! That would be too much—too sudden! You must not go to-day!”

“Why not, dearest? I shall return one day the sooner for it doubtless; and it will be as hard to part to-morrow as to-day.”

“But it is so sudden—so unexpected!” she pleaded. “Delay till to-morrow, Francis!”

“Well, anything to please you,” and I stamped the promise with a seal of love. “Be cheerful as you can in my absence, Lilian; and when I return with your brother—”

“Oh, then you are going to find him!” she exclaimed, interrupting me. “That return will be joyful indeed! Poor Charles! If you do not meet him on the way, most likely you will in Boston. Cheer him all you can, Francis! and tell him we are as happy as circumstances will allow us to be.”

“Beg pardon, your honor!” said the voice of Teddy at the moment, startling Lilian, like a frightened roe, from my arms; “beg pardon for interrupting yees!—but the baast ye buyed, this while ago, is not inywhere to my knowing.”

“Never mind, Teddy; go and hunt it. It must be about, unless the Indians have stolen it; in which case I must get another. Hunt for it—I shall not leave to-day.”

“Troth, thin, I’ll have another parthing mesilf, jist!” returned Teddy, as he disappeared with a pleased look.

At this moment Mrs. Huntly, hearing another voice,

reappeared, and my *tête-à-tête* with Lilian was for the time broken off.

The former had a great many questions to ask me—why I had decided leaving so suddenly—when I expected to reach Boston, and the like—so that I had no little difficulty in replying in a way not to commit myself.

Then she had letters to write to her friends; and Lilian had letters to prepare also; and the news of my departure having circulated quickly through the village, numbers called to see me, to send messages and letters to their native land; so that what with listening to their requests, to an extra amount of advice as to the proper mode of conducting myself under all circumstances, and attending to my own affairs, I was kept busy all day, without the opportunity of another private interview with Lilian.

A fine horse, which I had purchased a few days before of an Indian, was lost—the late owner I suppose, or some of his friends, having thought it best to recover the animal without troubling me in the matter at all. Consequently another beast was to be procured; and as this was for Teddy, I allowed him to make his own selection—the one I had ridden hither still being in my possession.

At last, everything being prepared, I retired to my couch, heartily fatigued with my day's work.

But thought was too busy to allow me much sleep; and I question if at least *one* other did not pass a restless night from the same cause; for, on appearing in the morning, I noticed that the features of Lilian were very pale, and her eyes red as if from recent weeping.

But she seemed firm, ready to endure the separation, and uttered not a single word of complaint.

I could have loved her for this, if for nothing else—her conduct was so womanly and sensible.

She did not feel the less, that she did not show it more, I knew. She was about to part with one she had loved from childhood—one to whom her heart and hand were pledged—and this in a strange, wild country, for a long separation, full of peril to both, with no certainty of ever seeing him again. It could not but be painful to

her in any situation—doubly so in the one she was placed—and I fancy I appreciated her noble firmness as it deserved.

The countenances of Mrs. Huntly, Madame Mortimer, Eva, and many others, all were grave; and I read in their looks unfeigned sorrow at my close-coming departure.

The morning meal was eaten in silence, as all were too sad and full of deep thought for unnecessary conversation. Ere it was finished, my friends had all collected to bid me farewell and God speed; and the announcement by Teddy, that the horses were ready, was the signal for me to begin the parting scene.

Commencing with those I cared least about, I shook each heartily by the hand, and passed from one to the other as rapidly as possible.

"Francis Leighton," said Madame Mortimer, when I came to her, and her hand pressed mine warmly, and her voice trembled as she spoke, "remember that to you and your friend my daughter owes her life, and I a debt of gratitude that may never be canceled. If my prayers for your safe and happy return be of any avail, you have them. God bless you, sir! and remember, that, whatever may happen in this changing world, in me, while living, you have a warm friend; and (approaching and whispering in my ear), so has Lilian and her mother. While I have aught, they shall never want. Farewell, my friend—farewell; but, I hope, only for a time."

Madame Mortimer stepped aside, and I turned to Eva. There was no merriment in her look now—nothing light upon her tongue.

"You have heard the words of mother," she said, impressively. "They are not meaningless. To you and your friend I am indebted for my life. My conversation at times may have seemed light and trifling; but notwithstanding, Francis, I would have you believe there is a *heart* beneath all, that does not overlook the merits of its friends, nor feel lightly for their welfare. When you see your friend, tell him that he is prayed for daily, by one who, though she never saw him, can never cease to remember him. Adieu! and may God bear you safely

through all peril!" and she turned away, as if to hide a tear.

"Francis," said Mrs. Huntly, striving to command her voice, which trembled not a little, as she held both my hands in hers: "Francis, it is hard—very, very hard—to part with you. But I suppose I must, and I hope it is all for the best. I have had so much trouble within a few years—have seen so many of those I once supposed my friends forsake me—that it really becomes grievous to part with any of the few I have tried and not found wanting. But go, Francis, and God protect you! Should you be fortunate enough to meet with dear Charles—(here her voice faltered to a pause, and she was forced to dash away the tears dimming her eyes)—tell—tell him all. Break the matter gently, if he does not already know it—and—and comfort him the best way you can. My love—my deepest, undying love—to your parents and all my friends. There—there—I can say no more—no more. Go, Francis, and God's blessing and mine attend you! Good-bye! farewell!" and, shaking my hands warmly, with her head averted, she dropped them and disappeared into another apartment, seemingly too much affected to tarry longer in my presence.

With a proper delicacy, for which I gave them ample credit, one after another departed, until I was left alone with Lilian.

While these several partings were taking place, she had remained seated, watching the whole proceedings, with what feelings I leave lovers to judge.

I now turned to her, and felt that the grand trial was at hand, and my heart seemed to be in my very throat.

Her sweet countenance was pale and death-like, her very lips were white, and her eyes full of tears. There was no shyness, no trembling, no apparent excitement. She seemed, as her heavenly blue eyes fixed themselves upon mine, rather a beautiful figure, cut from the purest marble, cold and motionless, than a living, breathing, human being. But, oh! what thoughts, what agonies,

were rending that soul within ! mastered only by a most powerful will !

With a step none of the firmest, I approached and took a seat by her side, and laid my hand upon hers.

"Lilian," I said, in a scarcely articulate voice ; "Lilian, the time has come to—to—part."

She did not reply in words—she could not ; but she rose to her feet, her ivory arms encircled my neck, and her feelings found vent in tears upon my heaving breast.

Smile, if you will, reader—you who have passed the romantic bounds of a first pure and holy passion, and become identified with the cares and dross of a money-getting, matter-of-fact, dollar-and-cent-life—smile if you will, as your eye chances upon this simple passage ; and curl your lip in proud disdain of what you now consider foolish days of love-sick sentimentality ; but remember, withal, that, in your long career of painful experience, you can refer to no period when you felt more happiness, more unadulterated joy, than that when the being of your first ambition and love lay trustingly in your arms. It is a point in the life of each and all who have experienced it (and to none other are these words addressed), which can never be erased from the tablet of memory ; and though in after years we may affect to deride it as the weakness of youth, it will come upon us in our reflective moments, like a warm sunshine suddenly bursting upon a late cold and gloomy landscape ; and insensibly, as it were, our spirits will be borne away, to live over again, though briefly, the happiest moments of our existence. The man who has passed the prime and vigor of manhood without ever having felt this—without this to look back to—I pity ; for he has missed the purest enjoyment offered to mortal ; and his whole path of life must have been through a sterile desert, without one green blade or flower to relieve its barren waste.

For some moments the heart of Lilian beat rapidly against mine, and her tears flowed hot and fast. I did not attempt to restrain the latter, for I knew they would bring relief to an overcharged soul, and I rejoiced that

she could weep. At length they ceased, and Lilian spoke.

"I will not detain you longer, dear Francis! For you and I, who know each other so well, words are idle and unmeaning, or at least unexpressive of our feelings. Avoid danger for your own sake, and for the sake of her who loves you; and do not forget that she will count the days, the hours, ay, the *minutes*, of your absence."

"I will not, dearest Lilian!" I exclaimed, straining her to my breast, and pressing my lips again and again to hers. "I will not forget there lives an angel to make happy my return; and God send my return may make her happy also! Adieu, dearest—take heart—do not despond—and Heaven grant our meeting may be soon! There, God bless you! and holy angels guard you!" and, taking a farewell salute, I gently seated her as before, and rushed from the cottage.

Two fiery horses stood saddled and bridled at the door, pawing the earth impatiently; and snatching the bridle of one from the hand of Teddy, I vaulted into the saddle.

The next minute I was dashing away at a dangerous speed, but one that could scarcely keep pace with my thoughts.

CHAPTER IV.

OUR PERILS BEGIN.



WITH the mind completely engrossed, the body often acts mechanically, or by instinct, and performs, without our knowledge at the time, exactly what reason would have dictated; and when some trifling circumstance recalls us to ourselves, we arouse as from a dream, and are surprised at what has been accomplished during our brief alienation.

So was it with myself in the present instance.

On, on I sped, as if riding for life, my hand firmly upon the rein, guiding unerringly my high-mettled beast, and yet unconscious of anything external, with thoughts wild and painful rushing through my brain.

How long or far I had ridden thus, I do not exactly know, though miles now lay between me and Oregon City ; nor how much longer I should have continued at the same break-neck speed, had my horse not stumbled, and thus broken the monotony of a steady ride by unseating and nearly throwing me over his head.

Recovering my position, and reining my beast to a halt, I found him covered with foam, and very much blown from his late run ; and that I was upon a narrow upland prairie, which stretched away before me for several miles, fringed on either hand, at no great distance, with a beautiful wood.

"Where am I?" was my first involuntary exclamation ; "how did I get here with a whole neck ? and where is Teddy ?"

The last question found a more ready answer than either of the preceding, in a shout from the veritable Teddy O'Lagherty himself.

I looked behind and beheld him coming as if on a race with death for the last half hour of his existence. His appearance was not a little ludicrous. His body was bent forward at an angle of forty-five degrees, so as to allow him to grasp the mane of the beast—his only hope—his feet having slipped from the stirrups, which were dangling against the animal's flanks, and serving the purpose of spurs—while his hat, for security being held in his teeth, smothered the shouts he was making to attract my attention. Add to this, that the horse had no guide but his own will, that at every spring Teddy bounced from the saddle to the imminent danger of his neck, and greatly to the aid of his digestive organs, and an idea of the discomfiture of the poor fellow may be formed, as his horse dashed up alongside of mine and came to a dead halt.

It is said there is but one short step from the sublime to the ridiculous, and I certainly felt the force of the

proverb on the present occasion. I had been half mad with distracting thoughts; but everything was now forgotten; and I burst forth in a roar of laughter, such as I am certain had never startled those solitudes before.

"Be the howly Moses!" cried Teddy, regaining an upright position, with a face the hue of a boiled lobster; "is ye mad now, ye divil?—beg pardon!—your honor, I maan. Jabers! what a ride! Och! I'm done for—claan murdered intirely—all pumice from me toes upward, barring me body and head-piece, jist."

"Why, Teddy," returned I, as soon as I could get calm enough to command my voice, "what new feature of horsemanship is this you have adopted? I am sure you would make your fortune in any circus, with such a heroic display of your animal capacities."

"Agh! ye may laugh and be d—plased to yees; but it's me mother's own son as feels more like crying, so it is! Fortune, is it, ye mintioned? Be howly St. Christopher! it's not mesilf that ud do the likes agin for twinty fortunes. Och! I'm killed intirely—all barring the braathing, that lingers still."

"Well, well, Teddy, I trust you will not have to repeat it," pursued I, laughing still. "But, come—where do you think we are?"

"Think, is it? Ye ax me to think? Sure, divil of a think I've got in me now! I lift it all on the road, that was no road at all, but the worst traveled counthry I iver put eyes on. We may be among the Hindoo haythen, for all me knows conthrawise; for not a blissed thing did I sae on the journey, but r-rocks, traas and stumps, and the divil knows what all, and thim a-going so fast I couldn't git time to say good-bye to 'em."

To the best of my judgment, we had come about five miles, in a direction due east.

Far in the distance before me, I now beheld the lofty, snow-crowned peak of Mount Hood; and toward this, without further delay, we bent our steps, at a pace strongly contrasting with the speed which had borne us hither.

"Why did you not call to me, when you saw me riding at a rate so fearful?" I inquired.

"Call, is it?" replied Teddy. "Faith! jist ax me lungs if I didn't call, till me breath quit coming for the strain upon 'em."

"And so you couldn't make me hear, eh?"

"Make the dead hear! Och! I might as well av called to a graveyard, barring the looks of the thing. Was yees mad, your honor?"

"Oh, no, Teddy—only a little excited at parting with my friends."

"Agh! thim same parthings is mighty har-r-d, now, so they is!" rejoined Teddy, with a sigh.

"So you can speak from experience, eh?"

"Be me troth, can I, now; and so can Molly Stubbs—the swaat crathur that she is."

"Did it break her heart, Teddy?"

"It's not asy for me to say, your honor; but it broke her gridiron, and the ounly one she had at that, poor dear!"

"Her gridiron?" I exclaimed, struggling to repress my risible faculties and keep a grave face, for I saw Teddy was in sober earnest, and totally unaware that there was anything ludicrous in his remark. "How did it affect the gridiron, Teddy?"

"Why, ye sae now, she was jist holding it betwaan her two fingers, and fixing for a fry maybe, whin up I comes, and tapping her under the chin, by raason of our ould acquaintance, I sez:

"'It's a blissed day I saw ye first, me darling.'

"'That it was, Misther Teddy,' sez she.

"'I wish that first maating could last foriver,' sez I.

"'And so do I,' sez she.

"'But it won't,' sez I; and thin I sighed, and she axed me what was the mather.

"'Oh, worra! worra!' I sez; 'it's about to part we is, Molly, dear.'

"'Ye don't say the likes!' sez she; and thin down come the gridiron, as if the Ould Scratch was a riding it, smash upon the stone harth, and into me arms pitched Molly, wid a flood of tears that made me look wathery for a long occasion. Now it's not what we did after-wards I'm going to till, at all, at all; but whin we both

come sensible, our eyes besaw the gridiron all broke, and not wort a ha'pence. Molly cried, she did, and I gin her a month's wages to ase her conscience. Musha, now, but parthings is har-r-d, so they is."

In this and like manner I managed to relieve my mind of many gloomy thoughts, which otherwise must have painfully depressed it.

I had parted the second time with Lilian, for a journey equally as full of peril as the first, and, if anything, of a more indefinite character.

I was going in search of my lost friend, it is true ; but what little chance had I, I thought, when I came to look at it soberly, of finding him, even if alive. I might travel thousands on thousands of miles—be months, even years, on the search—and yet be no nearer revealing his locality than when I set out. If living, it was a mere chance if we should ever meet again, and nothing perhaps but a kind Providence could bring us together.

As may be inferred, when I quitted my friends in Oregon City I had no definite plan arranged ; and now that I was really on the journey, the question naturally arose as to what I should do, how first to proceed, and where to begin. I had resolved on engaging assistance, but where was this to be found ?

For some time I puzzled my own brain with the matter, and then referred it to Teddy.

Though brought up in an humble sphere of life, with very little education, Teddy was nevertheless a keen, shrewd observer, and of excellent judgment in matters coming within the range of his intellect and experience ; and accordingly I relied much upon his advice.

Having heard the case fully stated, with the gravity of a judge, and asked several pertinent questions, he replied, that our best course, in his humble opinion, was to continue our present route as far as Fort Hall, where we would be likely to augment our number to our satisfaction, and could then proceed in a southerly direction and be guided by succeeding events.

As this tallied exactly with my own views, the plan was quickly adopted, and I rode forward with the great

mental relief that I now had a fixed purpose, whether right or wrong.

For several miles our course lay over the upland prairie I have mentioned ; then the ground changed and became more rolling ; and this in turn gave place to hills, sometimes sparsely and sometimes densely wooded, interspersed with rocks, gullies and deep ravines, that greatly impeded our progress.

We halted to noon in a little valley, through which, with a roaring sound over its rocky bed, dashed a bright stream of pure water, on whose banks grew rich, green grass, of such luxuriance as to satisfy the appetites of our animals in a very short time.

While partaking of some plain food, of which we had a small store, we amused ourselves by overhauling our rifles, examining their priming, as well as our other weapons and ammunition, and seeing that everything was in a proper condition to meet danger.

Scarcely was this over, when in a whisper Teddy called my attention to a fine, fat buck, which was trotting along within rifle shot.

Quick as thought I drew up my piece and fired.

The animal instantly bounded forward a short distance, reeled, and fell upon its side.

The next moment we were on our way to examine the carcass, and take from it the most suitable portions for our wants.

We had scarcely proceeded twenty paces, when Teddy, grasping my arm, exclaimed :

" Injins, be jabers !"

And sure enough, just issuing from a clump of bushes, on the opposite side of the valley, distant less than two hundred yards, were six half-naked savages, armed, two of them, with rifles or muskets, and the others with bows and arrows.

As it was impossible to divine their intentions, only by their acts, and as they made straight toward us, I snatched Teddy's rifle from his hands, and, ordering him to load mine as quick as possible, raised it to my shoulder, determined, should they prove hostile, to sell

my life dearly, and die, if I must, with the satisfaction of having done my duty in self-defense.

Perceiving my movement, they came to a halt, and made me friendly signs, by extending their open hands and then placing them on their hearts.

Dropping the muzzle of my rifle, I did the same, and then waited for them to come up—though, it must be confessed, with not the most faith imaginable in their amicable professions.

However, I kept well on my guard ; and by the time they had shortened the first-mentioned distance between us by a hundred paces, Teddy coolly announced that two bullets were at their service at any moment they might choose.

As they approached us, I made them out, by their costume and paint, to belong to the Chinook tribe, whose grounds lie due north of Oregon City, on the opposite side of the Columbia River. I had frequently seen more or less of them in the village ; and had, in fact, purchased the horse, mentioned as being stolen, from one of their tribe ; so that I now feared less a design upon my life than upon my property.

The party in question were all inferior beings, both in size and appearance ; but one seemed superior to the others, and possessed of command.

He approached me in advance of his companions, and held out his hand, which I accepted and shook in a friendly manner.

He next proceeded to Teddy, and each in turn followed his example.

When all had done, the chief addressed me in broken English :

“Where you come ?”

“From the village, yonder,” I replied, pointing with my finger toward Oregon City.

“Where go ?”

“Away beyond the mountains,” and I pointed eastward.

“Good muskee (musket) got ?”

I nodded in the affirmative.

“Good hoss got ?”

I nodded again.

"Good present got, eh? poor Injin, eh?"

"I have nothing but some tobacco I can spare," I answered—of which I still had a pretty good supply.

"Ugh! backee good!" rejoined the chief, with a smile.

This was in my sack on my horse, and I was not sorry of an excuse to get to him without showing myself suspicious of my new acquaintances; for I had noticed many a wistful glance cast in that direction; and I feared lest, presuming on our weakness, they might think proper to take our animals and leave us to make the best of it.

Accordingly I informed the savage where the article was, and that I must go alone and get it.

"Why me no go?" he asked.

"Then your followers must stay behind."

"Why dey no go?" he inquired, a little angrily as I thought.

"Because I shall not permit it!" I replied, decisively.

"Ugh! we so—you so!" he rejoined, holding up first six, and then two fingers, to indicate the number of each party. "We strong—you weak—we go, eh?" and he made a step forward.

In an instant the muzzle of my rifle was pointed at his breast, and my finger on the trigger; a movement imitated by Teddy, who quickly covered another.

"Another step, chief," I said, "and you are a dead man!"

"Back, ye divils—ye dirthy blaggards!—don't yees hear the gintleman spaking to yees now?" shouted Teddy.

This peremptory decision had a salutary effect upon the white-livered knaves, who instantly shrunk cowering back—the chief at once exclaiming, in a deprecating tone:

"No shoot. We no go. You go."

Fearing treachery, we instantly started for our horses, keeping our faces to our foes, and our rifles leveled, prepared for the worst.

Having secured a few plugs of tobacco, we both

mounted and returned to the savages, among whom I made an immediate distribution.

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The chief thanked me, and said they would now go home.

Accordingly, the whole party set off in one direction, and we in another, rifles in hand.

We had scarcely gone twenty paces, when crack went a musket behind us, and a ball whizzed over my head.

"The treacherous scoundrels!" I exclaimed; and wheeling my horse as I spoke, I beheld the whole six running and dodging for their lives.

Singling out the villain that had fired at us, I drew up my rifle and pulled trigger.

The next moment he lay howling in the dust, deserted by his cowardly friends, whose speed seemed greatly accelerated by this event.

Teddy would have gone back for his scalp; but this I would not permit, both on account of its barbarity, and because by delay we might encounter another party.

Setting spurs to our horses, therefore, we dashed rapidly away, leaving our game and foes behind us, and congratulating ourselves upon our providential escape.

For the rest of the day our progress was by no means slow, though the traveling at times was most execrable.

The sun was already throwing a long shade to the eastward, when, ascending a rough, stony ridge, which we had been forced to do circuitously, we beheld below us a beautiful plain, of miles in length and breadth, along the eastern portion of which towered the lofty Cascade Mountains, with the everlasting snow-crowned Mount Hood rising grandly above all, till lost beyond the clouds, glittering like a pinnacle of burnished silver in the rays of the sinking sun. It was a sublime and beautiful scene for the painter and poet, and for many minutes I paused and gazed upon it with feelings of reverence and awe for the great Author of a work so stupendous.

Descending to the base of the hill, we found a suitable place and encamped. Though greatly fatigued, I did not rest well; and either my thoughts, or the dismal

howlings of surrounding wolves, or both, combined with other circumstances, kept me awake the most of the night.

CHAPTER V.

A FRENCH AND IRISH QUARREL.



EARLY the following morning we were on our feet ; and, having partaken of a slight repast, we mounted and set off toward Mount Hood.

The traveling was now good, being over a rolling prairie, which, as we neared this colossal erection of nature, gradually became more and more level, so that, our horses being refreshed and full of fire, our speed was all that could be desired even by the most impatient.

Before noon we reached the base of Mount Hood ; and if I had thought it sublime at a distance, I now *felt*, as it were, its sublimity in an awful degree. Up, up, up it rose, until my eyes became strained to trace its glistening outline in the clear, blue ether. Its base was surrounded with sand, dead trees and broken rocks, which had accumulated there, perhaps, by the torrents of ages, as they had rushed and roared down its jagged sides. For a considerable distance above the plain it was well timbered ; then came a long stretch of green grass ; then a long barren spot ; and then commenced the snow and ice, which rose far beyond the ordinary height of the clouds ; the whole combined, forming a spectacle of which the pen can convey no adequate idea. To the right and left stretched away the Cascades, which, stupendous themselves, seemed as molehills in compare with Mount Hood. Far to the south rose the lofty peak of Mount Jefferson ; and as far to the north, on the other side of the Columbia, that of Mount St. Helens.

Having gazed upon the scene to my satisfaction, I

turned my horse to the right, and began my ascent up a valley, formed by the partial meeting of two hills, and down the very bed of which roared a sparkling streamlet.

The further I ascended, the more wild became the scene, the more precipitous and dangerous the path. In fact, on three occasions, we were obliged to dismount and lead our horses for a considerable distance, and once our steps had to be retraced for half a mile, in order to pass around a frightful chasm. Near the summit of the ridge we came upon a fine spring and an abundance of grass. Here we encamped for the night, during which I slept soundly.

The following day was cold and stormy, with sleet and snow.

This may surprise the reader who bears in mind that it was now June; but snow storms on the mountains are not regulated altogether by the seasons, and are frequently known to occur in one part of the country, while in another, not ten miles distant, the heat may be excessive.

As all are aware, the higher we ascend, the colder the atmosphere; and on many high mountains, in southern climes, there may be all kinds of temperatures, from the torrid to the frigid—from the valley of dates, figs and oranges, to the peaks of never-melting ice and snow—and this within the distance of five or ten miles.

Ere we raised our camp, I shot a mountain goat, being the first game we had killed since the buck of unfavorable memory.

Of this we prepared our breakfast, and also put a few choice pieces in our "possibles," leaving the balance to the wolves; which, in justice to the appreciation they showed thereof, I may say was nothing but a pile of shining bones ere we were fairly out of sight.

I now consulted an excellent map, which I had procured from one of the emigrants, and, referring to my compass, laid my course a little north of east, so as to strike the Dalles of Columbia, and thus the most traveled route to and from Oregon City.

The day, as I have said, being stormy, and our route

lying over a wild, bleak country, served not a little to depress the spirits of both Teddy and myself.

Nothing of consequence occurred through the day to distract our thoughts from their gloomy channel, and but little was said by either.

By riding hard, we gained the Dalles that night, and encamped on the banks of the Columbia.

Eager to arrive at Fort Hall, we again pushed forward on the succeeding day, and, following up the Columbia, reached Fort Walla Walla on the third from our quitting the Dalles, without any events worthy of particular note.

This fortress, constructed on the plan of Fort Laramie, described in a former chapter, I shall pass without notice, other than to say that it contained a small garrison of resolute and daring adventurers, or rather mountaineers and their squaw wives, who preferred passing their lives here in comparative ease, at good wages, to privations and perils of trapping in the wilderness.

Here I found a number of hardy fellows, who had lately "come in," and who were preparing to set off again for the Blue Mountains—some to hunt for game in the forests, and others to trap in the streams.

Here were also several friendly Indians (friendly through fear of the whites), the usual number of traders, peddlers, one or two land speculators and fur company agents, and one French *voyageur*—all more or less engaged in drinking, trafficking and gambling, the usual routine of a gathering of this kind.

Thinking it possible to raise a party here, I made a proposition to several, but found all had prior engagements.

I next made some inquiries concerning Black George ; and learned, much to my satisfaction, that he had been seen quite recently on the Blue Mountains ; and that in all probability I should find him at Fort Bois, or Fort Hall, as he was then slowly taking his way eastward.

"If you desire an excellent guide," said an agent to me, "let me recommend to you Pierre Boreaux ; who, though somewhat eccentric at times, you will find most

faithful in the discharge of his duty. I have tried him, sir, and know."

"Just what I desire," I replied.

"Come, then," he said; and taking me aside, he presented me to the individual in question, who was none other than the French *voyageur* previously mentioned.

He was a small, dapper personage, very neat in his appearance, with a keen, restless black eye, and a physiognomy more inclined to merriment than melancholy. His age was about forty, though he ever took pains to appear much younger. His *penchant* was for the wild and daring, and never was he so well contented as when engaged in some perilous enterprise. This, taken in connection with his jovial turn of mind, may at first seem paradoxical; but it must be remembered, that most persons incline less to their likes than their opposites; and that the humorist is the man who seldom smiles, while the man of gravest sayings may be literally a laughing philosopher. He was much addicted, too, to taking snuff, of which he always managed to have a good stock on hand, so that his silver box and handkerchief were in requisition on almost all occasions. He spoke with great volubility, in broken English, generally interlarded with French, accompanied with all the peculiar shrugs and gesticulations of his countrymen. He was, in short, a serio-comical, singular being, of whom I can convey no better idea than to let him speak and act for himself.

"Ah, Monsieur," he said, in reply to my salutation, taking a huge pinch of snuff the while and bowing very politely; "ver moche happee make you acquaintones. Vill you 'ave von—vot you call him—happenese, eh?—to take von leettle—I forgot him—so—(putting his thumb and finger together, to indicate a pinch)—avec moi, eh?"

"Thank you," I returned, "I never use the article in that shape."

"Ver sorre hear him. Vous remembre le grand Empereur Napoleone, eh?"

"Ay."

"Ah! von plus great sheneral him. He take snoof,

eh? Vell, you speak now—you—you—vot you call him—bussiness, eh?”

“I wish to engage you,” I replied, “to go on a journey full of peril in the capacity of a guide.”

“Ou allez-vous?”

“How?”

“Ah, pardonnez-moi! I say, vere you go?”

“To Mexico, perhaps.”

“Oui, Monsieur—I shall be vere moche delight—I certainment assure you. Ven you go, eh?”

“I leave here, *en route* for Fort Hall, at daylight to-morrow.”

Here the Frenchman took one or two hasty pinches of his favorite, and, closing his box, said:

“Von leetle absence, Monsieur; I sall 'ave von ver moche pleasure;” and off he skipped, as gay as a lark, to prepare himself for the journey.

At daylight on the succeeding morning the Frenchman was at his post, well mounted on a full-blooded Indian pony, armed to the teeth, and really looking quite the warrior.

Three minutes later we had all passed the gate and were speeding away.

This was the first meeting between Teddy and Pierre; and I soon became aware it was anything but a pleasant one, particularly on the part of Teddy, who cast many a furtive glance upon the other, expressive of dislike.

What this arose from—whether from jealousy, national prejudice, or contempt for the inferior proportions of Pierre—I was at a loss to determine. Never before had I seen animosity to a fellow-traveler so strongly depicted on the features of the faithful Teddy. It might be he fancied the Frenchman of equal grade with himself, and was jealous of his supplanting him in my favor, and this seemed the most probable of the three suggested causes.

Pierre, however, showed no ill-will to the Irishman, but merely returned his glances with a supercilious look, as though he considered him his inferior.

But he could not long remain silent; and so, after

riding on briskly for a short distance, he turned to Teddy, and with a mischievous twinkle in his small, black eye, said, with much suavity :

“Parlez vous Français?”

“Spake it in English, ye spalpeen ! and thin a gintleman can answer yees !” replied Teddy, reddening with vexation. “If it’s frog language ye’s jabbering, sure it’s not mesilf as wants to know what ye says, now.”

“Que voulez-vous, Monsieur?” inquired the Frenchman, looking slyly at me, with a significant shrug, and secretly enjoying the discomfiture of Teddy.

“Quack, quack, quack, kither hoben !” rejoined Teddy, fiercely. “Sure, now, and is it that ye can understand yoursilf, ye thafe? It’s maybe smart, now, ye’s afther thinking yoursilf, by token ye can say things I don’t know the maaning of. And so ye is smart, barring the foolish part, which comprehinds the whole of yees. Troth! can ye fight, Misther Frog-ater? Come, now, that’s Inglish; and, by St. Pathrick’s bones, I’ll wager ye’re too much of a coward to know the maaning on’t !”

“Come, come, Teddy,” I said, “you are getting personal. I can allow no quarreling.”

“Och! there’s no danger, your honor!” returned Teddy, turning upon Pierre a withering look of contempt. “It’s not iny frog-ater as is going to fight his bethers, and sure it’s not Teddy O’Lagherty as can fight alone, jist.”

Meantime there had been a quiet, half smile resting on the features of the Frenchman, as though he was secretly enjoying a fine joke. Even the abusive language of the excited Irishman did not appear to disturb his equanimity in the least. There he sat, as cool and apparently as indifferent as if nothing derogatory to his fighting propensities had been uttered, or at least understood by him.

I was beginning in fact to think the latter was the case, or else that Teddy was more than half right in calling him a coward, when I became struck with a peculiar expression, which suddenly swept over his bronzed features, and was superseded by the same quiet smile—as we sometimes at noon-day see a cloud flit over a bright landscape, shading it for an instant only.

Suddenly Pierre reined his pony close alongside of Teddy, and, in a very bland voice, as if begging a favor, said :

"Monsieur, you say someting 'bout fight, eh? Sare, I sall 'ave le plus grande delight to soot you with un—vot you call him—peestole, eh?"

"The divil ye will, now?" replied Teddy, with a comical look of surprise. "Sure, thin, an' it's mesilf that ud like to be doing the same to yoursilf, and ye was worth the powther it ud cost."

"Sare," returned the Frenchman, with dignity, "in my coontree, ven gentilshommes go for kill, dey nevare count ze cost. I soot you—I cut you troat—I sharge you notings."

"Well, be jabers! since ye've got your foul tongue into English, and be blamed to yees, I'll do the same for your dirthy silf!" retorted Teddy; "for it's not Teddy-O'Lagherty as 'll be behind aven a nager in liberalithies of that sort, now."

"You are both too liberal of your valor by half," I rejoined, laughing at what I thought would merely end in words.

But I was soon convinced of my error; for scarcely had the expression left my lips, when the Frenchman sprung from his pony, and, striking his hand on his pistols, exclaimed :

"Je l'attaquerai : I will 'ave at you, Monsieur, ven you do me von leetle honoor, sare!"

"It's not long you'll have to wait thin!" cried Teddy; and before I could interfere—or in fact was fully aware of what was taking place—he had dismounted and drawn a pistol. "Tin paces, ye blaggard!" he cried; "and may the saints be marciful to yees!"

"Hold!" I shouted. "Rash men, what are you about? I forbid—"

Here I was interrupted by the reports of two pistols, followed by a stifled cry of pain from Pierre, who instantly dropped his weapon and placed his hand to his shoulder.

The next moment I was on my feet, and rushing to his assistance, accompanied by Teddy, whose features,

instead of anger, now exhibited a look of commiseration.

"Are you hurt, Pierre?" I inquired, as I gained his side.

"Ver leetle scratch," replied the Frenchman, taking away his hand covered with blood.

I instantly tore away his garments, and ascertained that the ball of Teddy had passed quite through the fleshy part of his arm near the shoulder, but without breaking a bone or severing an artery.

"A lucky escape, Pierre!" I said.

He merely shrugged his shoulders, and coolly proceeded to take snuff, with an indifference that surprised me.

When he had done, he turned to Teddy, with :

"Vill you 'ave von more—vot you call him—le plus grand satisfactoine, eh?"

"Sure, and it's mesilf as is not over-parthicular, iny ways. If ye's satisfied, I'm contint—or conthrariwise, as plases ye most."

"Vell, den, suppose we shake hand, eh?" rejoined Pierre. "I soot you—you soot me: ve 'ave both satisfactione, eh?" and the next moment these two singular beings were pleasantly engaged in complimenting each other on his bravery.

Oh, curious human nature! From that moment Pierre Boreaux and Teddy O'Lagherty were sworn friends for life—nor did I ever hear an angry word pass between them afterward.

CHAPTER VI.

A GOOD JOKE AND A DISMAL NIGHT.



URSUING our course along the banks of the Walla-Walla, we passed Dr. Whitman's Station, and camped the following night in a romantic dell at the foot of a ridge adjoining the Grand Round.

In the course of the evening we were visited by several Indians, with whom we held a small traffic for provisions. For fear of evil consequences, we kept well on our guard, but they displayed no hostile intentions.

Pierre complained somewhat of his arm, which I had bandaged at the time as well as circumstances would permit. I advised him to consult the Indians, who are known to be great proficient in the healing art. He did so, and the result proved highly beneficial; so much so that he was able to use it sooner than I expected.

The next day we crossed the Grand Round (a delightful valley of twenty miles in extent, watered by a pleasant stream), also the Blue Mountains, and descended into the valley of the Snake River.

The scenes we passed over were, many of them, wild, and some of them romantic in the extreme; but as more important matters press upon me, I cannot pause to describe them.

The Indians we now beheld on every side of us—but they offered no violence.

The third day from crossing the Grand Round, we reached Fort Bois, where we passed the night.

The next morning we pursued our journey; having learned, meantime, that Black George, for whom I made particular inquiries, had passed here a few days before, in company with two other trappers, on their way to Fort Hall.

This was cheering news to me; and we pushed for-

ward, as fast as circumstances would permit, in the hope of overtaking him.

About noon of the third day from leaving Fort Bois, we came upon some half a dozen fine-looking springs, when Teddy declared he must quench his thirst.

As he descended from his horse, the Frenchman shrugged his shoulders and gave me a very significant wink.

"What do you mean, Pierre?" I inquired, fully at a loss to comprehend what seemed to him a capital joke.

"Paix ! le diable !" he exclaimed, laying his hand on my arm and pointing to Teddy, who, having reached a spring, was just in the act of bending down to the water. "Monsieur sall see."

"See?" I repeated.

"Oui, Monsieur."

"What shall I see?"

"Och ! howly Moses ! be St. Pathrick ! jabers !" cried Teddy at this moment, springing to his feet and running toward us with all his fleetness, holding his tongue with one hand and pressing the other upon his forehead. "Och ! murder ! I'm dead intirely—bit—ate up—claan killed, I is !"

"What is the matter?" I inquired, unable to comprehend the meaning of such strange actions, while Pierre leaned forward on his saddle and held both hands upon his sides, fairly screaming with laughter.

"Mather, is't?" rejoined Teddy. "Musha ! but it's mather intirely. Me tongue's burnt out of me, jist, baring about sax inches on't."

"Burned, Teddy?"

"Ay, burnt, your honor—that's the wor-r-d now. Sure, that's the devil's pool, and so it is, and it's himsilf must be hereabouts. Och ! but I'm in a hurry to lave the spot betimes ;" and springing into his saddle he rode away, in spite of my calls to the contrary, as fast as his beast could carry him.

"What is it, Pierre?" I exclaimed ; but Pierre was too much convulsed to answer me ; and, dismounting, I approached the miraculous water myself.

Now I understood the joke ; and, to do myself jus-

tice, I must say I so far imitated the Frenchman that I was unable to quit the spot for at least ten minutes.

In his eager desire for a cool, refreshing draught, Teddy had plunged his face down into and gulped in a mouthful of boiling water, from what are known as the Hot Springs.

Of these springs there are some five or six, the water of which bubbles up clear and sparkling, and, all meeting, form a small stream, which rolls away with a pleasing murmur.

No wonder Teddy, not understanding the phenomenon, and being superstitious too, should imagine Old Nick had something to do with it.

"Vell, you see, eh?" exclaimed Pierre, as I remounted. "By gar! him von ver moche good joke! He tink he von diable, eh?" and he ended with another hearty laugh, in which I was forced to join.

About three miles further on we overtook Teddy, whose running ardor had cooled down to a quiet walk.

"Ah, faith," said he, dolefully, "it's mighty feared I's beginning to git that ye'd not come at all, at all."

"Why so, Teddy?"

"Oh, worra! worra! that I should iver live to taste the devil's pool! And did ye sae him, body and bones, your honor?—and how did he look, if it's all the same to yees, and he no forbid your tilling rasonably?"

"Why, Teddy, there was nothing to be alarmed at;" and I proceeded to explain the mystery. "It is a very natural phenomenon, I assure you."

"Nath'ral, is it? Och! thin I have it, 'pon me sowl!"

"Have what?"

"Why, sure, your honor, I sae claan through it."

"Well, what do you see, Teddy?"

"Musha! but it's the devil's tae-pot."

"Tea-pot?"

"Ah! troth and it is. Ould Sathan is at the bothom of it, do yees mind! He haats the wather there, now, to coax saints to dhrink tae wid him, the spalpeen! and thin he'll make the most of 'em, d'ye sae, your honor! Och! it's a lucky man Teddy O'Lagherty is for gitting off so

asy, barring he's more unlucky by token he wint to the place at all, at all."

It had become a fixed fact with Teddy, which all my jests and arguments failed to alter, that the Hot Springs and his Satanic Majesty were indissolubly connected.

But this did not lessen the joke, which for a long time afterward served Pierre and myself as a specific for blue devils and *ennui*.

As I said before, we were traveling through a country thickly peopled with savages. What we had seen of these appeared to be friendly; but knowing the treacherous nature of many, we felt that self-preservation demanded we should at all times be on our guard.

For this purpose our arms were always ready to our hands in the day-time, and at night each took his turn of standing sentinel.

Thus far we had escaped every difficulty; but Pierre often warned us not to be too sanguine of reaching Fort Hall without a brush of some kind, as he well knew the nature of those surrounding us.

The sun was just sinking behind the Blue Mountains, when we came to a small stream, a tributary of Snake River, that took its devious course through a valley between two precipitous ridges, and thence through a cañon of a thousand feet in depth.

The valley was shaded by large trees of various kinds, and was romantic in its appearance. It contained good grazing also, and good water, and this made it a desirable camp-ground.

Hoppling our horses and setting them free, we kindled a fire, around which we squatted to cook our meat, smoke our pipes, and fill up the intervals with the most amusing subjects, among which Teddy and his "devil's tae-pot" came in for their full quota of mirthful comment.

At length we began to grow drowsy; and having seen our animals tethered within the circle of the fire, and it being Pierre's turn to stand guard, Teddy and I threw ourselves upon the ground, our blankets rolled around us, and soon were fast asleep.

For an hour or two everything passed off quietly, when Pierre awoke me with a gentle shake.

"Ver sorre, Monsieur, to—vot you call him—deesturb you, eh?—but ze tam Injen—sacre le diable!"

"Well," said I, starting up, "what is it? Are we attacked?" and at the same time I awoke Teddy.

"By gar," returned the Frenchman, "I see von leetle—vot you call him—sneaker, eh? Him creep—creep—creep—and I tink I wake you, sare, and soot him dead!"

"Faith, that's it?" cried Teddy, grasping his rifle and springing to his feet: "that's it, now! Shoot the haythen!"

By this time I was fully aroused to the sense of danger; and quickly learning from Pierre where he had seen the savage, I grasped my rifle and sprung beyond the fire-light, in an opposite direction, followed by my companions.

We had not gained ten paces, when crack, crack, went some five or six muskets, the balls of which, whizzing over our heads, did not tend to lessen our speed.

We reached the covert unharmed, however, and for the time considered ourselves safe.

When we turned to reconnoiter, not a sign of a living thing could we see save our horses, which stood with ears erect, trembling and snorting, as if conscious of a hidden foe.

For an hour we remained in this manner; when, concluding the enemy had departed, I proposed returning to the fire.

"Hist!" whispered Pierre, grasping my arm. "You sall see, Monsieur."

And he was right; for, not ten minutes afterward, he silently directed my attention to some dark objects lying flat upon the ground, which, with all my experience and penetration, I could not believe were savages, until I perceived them gradually nearing our horses. Then I became alarmed, lest, reaching them, they might speedily mount and escape, leaving us to make the best of a perilous and toilsome journey on foot.

"What is to be done, Pierre? I fear we are in a bad fix."

"Je me couche—je tire sur lui ; I lie down sare—I soot at him. You sall see. Stay von leetle minneet. Ven you hears my canon, den you soot and run at him as le diable."

Saying this, Pierre glided away as noiselessly as an Indian, and I saw nothing more of him for several minutes.

Meanwhile Teddy and I kept our eyes intently fixed upon our stealthy foes, and our rifles in rest, ready to give them their deadly contents at a moment's warning.

Slowly, like a cat creeping upon her game, did these half-naked Indians, serpent-like, steal toward our animals, every moment lessening the distance between them and the objects of their desires.

I began to grow nervous. What had become of Pierre? If he intended to do anything, now I thought was the time ; a few moments more, and it would be too late ; and, acting upon this thought, I drew a bead upon the most advanced savage, and was about pulling the trigger, when the latter suddenly bounded to his feet, uttered a yell of delight, and sprung toward the now frightened animals, imitated in his manœuvre by some ten or twelve others.

"Good Heaven ! all is lost !" I exclaimed, bitterly.

The words had scarcely passed my lips, when bang went a pistol from among the horses ; and the foremost savage—the one I had singled out, and who was on the point of grasping one of the tether ropes—bounded into the air, with a horrible yell, and fell back a corpse.

This was wholly unlooked for by his companions, and checked for an instant those pressing on behind.

Remembering Pierre's request, I whispered to Teddy to "throw" his man and charge.

Both our rifles spoke together, and down tumbled two more.

At the same moment Pierre's rifle sent another to his account ; and, simultaneously springing forward, all three of us made the welkin ring with our shouts of joy and defiance.

This settled the matter to our triumph. The Indians became alarmed and bewildered. They had counted on certain success in stealing our horses without the loss of a man. Four had fallen in twice as many seconds ; and fancying themselves in an ambuscade, they turned, with wild yells of affright, and disappeared in every direction ; so that by the time I had joined Pierre, we were masters of the field, and not an unwounded foe in sight.

"You see hoss safe, Monsieur," said Pierre, hurriedly, as we met ; "and I see to ze Injen, eh?" and without waiting for a reply, he darted forward, and the next moment was engaged in tearing off the bloody scalps of the slain.

As every mountaineer considers this his prerogative, I did not interfere ; but ordering Teddy to assist me, we cut the lariats and led our horses back into the darkness, for fear of another attack, in which we might come out second best.

In a few minutes Pierre approached me leisurely, and laughingly said :

"Tout va bien : All pe vell, sare ;" and he held up to the light four bloody scalps. "Von, two, tree, not pe dead, I kill him. Good for—vot you call him—stealer, eh?—ha, ha, ha !" and taking out his box, he deliberately proceeded to take snuff with his bloody fingers ; adding, by way of accompaniment : "Von good ver moche exsallant joke, him—ha, ha, ha ! Sacre ! me tink him get von leetle—vot you call him—astonishment, eh ? By gar ! ver moche good."

As we did not consider it prudent to venture again within the fire-light, we decided to remain where we were through the night, and guard against a surprise.

All was dark around us, except in the direction of the roaring fire, which, flickering to the passing breeze, made the scene of our late encampment look dismal enough.

To add to its gloom and cheerlessness, we were presently greeted with the distant howl of a hungry pack of wolves. Every moment these howls grew louder, showing the animals were approaching the spot, while our

horses snorted and became so restive we could scarcely hold them

Nearer and nearer came the hungry beasts of prey, till at length we could perceive their fiery eyeballs, and occasionally catch a glimpse of their bodies, as they hovered around the circle of the fire, fearing to approach the carcasses they so much coveted.

For an hour or two they prowled and howled around us, "making night hideous with their orgies," while the fire gradually grew less and less bright, the gloom deepened, and their boldness increased accordingly.

At last one, unable longer to bear the keen pangs of hunger, leaped forward and buried his teeth and claws in the carcass of one of our late foes; the others followed his example; and in less than a minute as many as fifty of these ravenous animals were growling, fighting, gnashing their teeth, and tearing the flesh from the bones of the dead Indians.

Pierre now informed me we were in imminent danger of being attacked ourselves—as, having once tasted blood, and their appetites being rather sharpened than appeased, they would only become more bold in consequence.

To my inquiry as to what should be done, he replied that we must continue to kill one of their number as fast as he might be devoured by his companions; and, setting the example, he shot one forthwith.

Sure enough! no sooner had the beast fallen, than the rest sprung upon and devoured him.

My rifle being loaded, I knocked over another, which met the same fate!

In this manner we kept firing alternately for a couple of hours, during which time the old stock was replenished by new-comers, and I began to fancy that all of the genus would be present before daylight.

But at last one after another got satisfied, and slunk away, licking his chaps. No new ones appeared; and, ere the stars grew dim, nothing was visible of the last night's butchery but a collection of clean-licked, shiny bones.

While the fire lasted, we could see to take sight; but

after that went out, we fired at random ; though, knowing the exact location of the beasts, our shots generally proved successful in killing or wounding.

When morning again put a smiling face upon the recent sable earth, we mounted our horses and left the loathsome spot, thanking God for our providential deliverance.

CHAPTER VII.

THE OLD TRAPPER AGAIN.



T was a warm, pleasant afternoon in June that we came in sight of Fort Hall, which we hailed with three cheers of delight ; and, setting spurs to our horses, in less than half an hour we rode gayly through the gates.

As we entered the area, which, though much smaller, was fashioned like Fort Laramie, I perceived a small group of mountaineers or trappers, among whom were two or three Indians, all apparently engaged in some important traffic. The next moment I heard a well-known voice exclaim :

"It's done gone then, or I'm no snakes ; and heyar's what never backs for nobody and nothin' !"

The next moment the speaker sauntered toward me, just as I had dismounted from my horse.

As he approached, he looked me steadily in the face for a moment ; and then, springing forward, with hand extended and flashing eyes, he fairly shouted :

"Bosson ! for a thousand wild cats ! I'll be dog-gone ef it ain't !" and, ere the sentence was concluded, my hand was suffering under the powerful but welcome pressure of that of Black George. "Wall," he added, "I'll be teetotal rumflumuxed, ef I don't think you're a trump, and a ace at that ! Whar d'ye come from now ?

and which way's you goin'? ef it's not tallied on a private stick."

"I came direct from Oregon City," I answered, by no means backward in displaying my delight at meeting him again.

"Whar's the garls?"

"Left them all behind me."

"Augh! S'pect you left your heart thar too, eh?"

"Possibly."

"I'd sw'ar it. Wall, hoss, I don't blame ye. Them's about as nice human picters as ever this critter seed. Ef I'd a ben thirty year younger, I mought hev got into deep water thar myself and lost the whole kit. Howsomever, this coon never tried treein' a garl but once't—and Suke Harris soon blowed damp weather on to my powder, and it warn't no shoot, nohow—augh! Wall, wall," he added, with something like a sigh, "them's by-gones anyhow, and s'pect it's all for the best; 'case I'm an old dog, and lead a wanderin' life; and when I kind o' git rubbed out—why, ye see, I hain't got no pups nor nothin' to be a barkin' over my last roost."

Here Black George coughed a little, and turned aside his head, when his eyes chanced upon Teddy and Pierre, who, having dismounted at another part of the inclosure, were now approaching to join me.

"Why, hello, hoss! how goes it?" continued the old trapper, addressing the Irishman and extending his hand. "And here's Pierre, too, lookin' as nateral as a young cub; and I'll be dog-gone ef that same old smell-box ain't jest whar it used to was, a reg'lar fortress, makin' his fingers runners 'twixt it and his nose. Augh! gin us a chaw'r and see the ginteel done."

"Faith, ye're the same ould chap!" rejoined Teddy, grasping one hand, while the Frenchman took the other. "Sure and it's good for sore eyes to sae the likes o' ye'es ag'in!"

"Ah, Monsieur Blake Shorge," added Pierre, "it give me von ver moche le plus grande delight, for—vot you call him—discoverment you, eh? Ver exceeding moche glad, by gar!"

As soon as the congratulations were over on all sides, Black George turned to me with :

"Well, Bosson, hearn anything o' your pardner?"

"Nothing; and I am now on my way to hunt him out, if among the living."

"A long tramp, and no beaver, or I'm no sinner!"

"You think it impossible for me to find him, then?"

"Wall, hoss, it's hard sayin' what's unpossible; but I'd jest as soon think o' huntin' for a singed tail beaver, I would, and odds on my side to that."

Here I entered into an explanation of how he was lost, and wound up by asking :

"And now do you not think it possible he was taken prisoner?"

"Nothin' agin it, as I knows on."

"And if taken prisoner by the Mexicans, is it not possible—nay, more, is it not probable—he was sold into slavery?"

"Why," replied Black George, who seemed struck with this last suggestion, "I'll gin in it sort o' edges that way, that's a fact—I'll be dog-gone ef it don't! But s'pose it's all so—how's you to diskiver him?—'case it looks a heap mixed to this child, to see it in the cl'arest light."

"That is just what I wish to know myself, and for that purpose I have started on the search—being the least, to my mind, I could do under the circumstances."

"Then you're bound sothe, I s'pose?"

"Exactly; and I want you to join me, with three as good men as you can select."

"Ah, yes; but ye see it's beaver time now, and—"

"I understand; but I am willing to pay you as much as you could make in your regular vocation."

"You is, hey? Wall, come, now, that's a sensible and feelin' speech, and you couldn't hev bettered the gist on't ef you'd a splattered it over with all the big words you knows. I like a straight for'ard-toe-the-mark way o' dealin'—I'll be dogged ef I don't!—and bein's I know you're a gentleman—why, I'll jest tell ye I'm in, ef it takes all my ha'r to put her through. Besides, thar's a chance to raise ha'r, and that's a sport as this coon al'ays had a nateral

incline for. I've jest got in from the Blues, and made a sale of some hides—so I'm ready to travel and fight jest when you says the word. Got any bacca?"

"Can you raise me three more of the same sort?"

"I reckon."

"Do so; and we will start, if possible, to-morrow morning."

"Wall, that'll jest save me a big spree—augh! I say, boys," he continued, drawing from the pocket of his hunting-shirt a small canteen, "got the critter here—and so s'pose we take an inside wet, eh? S'pect 'twon't hurt your feelings none;" and he set an example which was very accurately followed.

"By the by, George," said I, "have you seen or heard anything of Prairie Flower, since that night when she appeared, gave the alarm, and disappeared so mysteriously?"

"Jest what I's a-goin' to ax you. No, I hain't never sot eyes on her purty face sence; but I hearn a trapper, as come from the sothe, say as he had seed her down to Taos way, and all her Injins was along. She was axin' him, now I come to remember, ef he'd hearn o' a prisoner bein' took that-a-ways and sold to the mines."

"Ha! yes! well? what did he reply?" exclaimed I, as a sudden thought struck me.

"That he'd hearn o' several—but none in partikelar."

"Heaven bless her! I understand it all!"

"All what?" inquired Black George.

"Why, when I saw Prairie Flower last, I informed her of the fate of Charles Huntly; and ten to one she has set off to search for him!"

"That's it, for my old muley!" cried Black George, not a little excited. "I've said afore she was a angel, and heyar's a possum that don't speak without knowin'! Lord bless her! I could love her like darnation, jest for that! Ef she ain't one on 'em, why was peraries made, hey?"

A few minutes more were spent in like conversation, when Black George parted from me to engage some companions for our journey.

Bidding Teddy look to our horses, I entered the com-

mon reception-room of the fort, greatly elated at the intelligence just received.

Sweet Prairie Flower ! She was doubtless at that very moment engaged in an undertaking which should have been performed by me long before, and I could not but condemn myself for what seemed either a great oversight or gross neglect of duty.

And should Heaven favor her, and she discover my friend and set him free, what a debt of gratitude would he owe her for saving him twice ? first from death, and secondly from a slavery worse than death.

And should this happen, what would be the result to two beings, who, whatever might be outward seemings, loved each other purely and passionately !

Sweet, mysterious Prairie Flower ! I could hardly realize she was only mortal ; for there was something in her every look, thought and deed, which seemed to lift her above the human race.

In the course of an hour Black George rejoined me, bringing with him three large-boned, robust, good-looking fellows, who, he informed me, were ready to follow me at a fair remuneration. In a few minutes everything was settled, when each departed to make preparations for an early start on the morrow.

A storm, however, set in during the night, which raged with such violence the next morning that I was compelled to defer my departure for twenty-four hours longer.

To me the day wore tediously away ; for my mind was continually harping on my lost friend and Prairie Flower ; and now that I had gained some intelligence of the latter, I could not avoid connecting the two in a way to raise my hopes in a great degree, and render me doubly anxious to be on the way.

But if the delay proved tedious to me, not so did it to my companions, who had a merry time of it over their cups and cards ; and they drank and played till it became a serious matter for them to distinguish an ace of trumps from a gill of whisky.

However, the day went at last, as all days will, and I

was gratified the second morning with a glance at the sun as it rose bright and glorious in the east.

I hastened to rouse my companions, who were rather the worse for the previous day's indulgence, and in a short time we were all mounted and in motion, a goodly company of seven.

Shaping our course southward, a couple of hours brought us to Port Neuf River, which we found very turbulent from the late storm, and in consequence very difficult to cross.

After examining the banks for some distance, and finding no good ford, we determined on swimming it.

This was no easy undertaking; for the current ran very swiftly, and loudly roared, as its flashing but muddy waters dashed furiously against the rocks, which here and there reared their ugly heads, as if with a half-formed intention of damming and forcing it into another channel.

"Monsieur," said Pierre to me, as we stood hesitating what to do, "you see ze odder bank, eh?"

I nodded assent.

"Sacre! now I tell you I sall 'ave von grande satisfactione of put my foot dere—or I sall be von—by gar! vot you call him—dead, wet homme, eh?"

As he spoke, he spurred his horse forward, and the next moment the fiery animal was nobly contending with an element, which, in spite of his struggles, rapidly bore him down on its bosom; while his rider, as if to show his utter contempt for danger, sat erect on his back, coolly engaged in taking snuff.

"Thunder!" exclaimed Black George, with a grin; "ef thar ain't that old smell-box ag'in! Ef ever he goes under, he'll do it with a sneeze. Augh!"

"Sure and it's throublesome he finds the wather now, I'm thinking," observed Teddy.

"Good heavens! he is indeed in difficulty!" I exclaimed. "Quick! let us ride down the bank and be prepared to give him aid!"

And in fact our aid came none too soon; for the stream had borne both rider and horse down to a narrow channel, where the water rushed furiously over the rocks, and, being partially obstructed below, formed an eddy or

whirlpool of a very dangerous character, in which the beast was floundering and vainly striving to reach either bank.

By this time Pierre had become aware of his danger, and was exerting his utmost skill to keep his seat and guide his animal safely out of the fearful vortex.

Just below him was a short, narrow reach, of considerable depth, with a slight fall at its further termination, where the water seethed and foamed with great violence; after which it became comparatively tranquil, as it spread out on a broad level, to again concentrate its greatest force at a point still below.

As we reached the bank alongside of the guide, we all dismounted; when Black George, leaping upon a steep rock which overhung the stream, instantly threw him a rope that he had selected for the purpose.

Pierre caught one end of it eagerly, and, fearing to remain longer where he was, instantly abandoned his horse and plunged into the water.

The next minute we had drawn him ashore, though not entirely scatheless, as the whirling current had several times thumped him against the rocks, and bruised his limbs and body in several places.

Pierre, however, seemed to care more for his horse than himself; and no sooner had he found a safe footing on *terra firma*, than, giving himself a shake, he cried: "Mine hoss, by gar!" and darted away to the rescue of the unfortunate brute, which was now being hurried against his will through the cañon.

We all followed Pierre down the stream; but ere we gained the tranquil part of the river, before spoken of, the animal had passed safely over the falls, and, with a joyful whinny, was now fast swimming to the shore, where he was soon caught by his owner, who expressed his joy in sundry shouts and singular antics.

"Ah! sacre!" cried the Frenchman, as he remounted his gallant pony, shaking his hand with an air of defiance at the heedless river: "I sall 'ave von le plus satisfacione again try your tam trowning;" and no sooner said, than he spurred into the liquid element, and succeeded, after

some difficulty, in gaining the opposite shore; an example we all safely imitated.

We now struck one of the most northern points of the Bear River Mountains; and for the rest of the day we pursued our course without accident, over steep ridges, through dangerous defiles, dense thickets, deep gorges and ravines, passing yawning chasms, and all the concomitants of wild mountain scenery.

Sometimes we stood on a point which commanded an extensive view of a country of great beauty and grandeur—where the soul could expand and revel amid the unchanged fastnesses of a thousand years—and anon we were completely hidden from the sight of anything but the interwoven shrubbery, through which we diligently labored our way.

At last we came to a fine spring, around which grew a limited circle of excellent grass, presenting the appearance of a spot, which, at some remote period, had been cultivated.

Here we encamped, built a fire, ate our suppers, and slept to the music of howling wolves.



CHAPTER VIII.

TRAPPING AND A STAMPEDE.



It is unnecessary to weary the reader with further details of mountain life. Unless in cases of extreme peril, from savages or wild beasts, the scenes are monotonous; and enough I think has been recorded to give a correct idea of life as it is, with all its dangers and hardships, beyond the boundaries of civilization. I may therefore be permitted to press forward and annihilate time and space, only pausing occasionally to give something

new, or something out of the regular routine of every day venture.

It was my intention, on leaving Fort Hall, to make the best of my way toward Taos, a small Mexican village, much frequented by mountaineers, situated on the western side of an arm of the Green Mountains, some fifty or sixty miles north of Santa Fé, and on a small tributary of the Rio Grande.

This was to be my first destination, and where I was in hopes of gaining some intelligence of my friend, from the many adventurers there collected, the traveling representatives of all the territories as well as Mexico.

It was possible, too, I might fall in with Prairie Flower and her tribe, from whom I had sanguine expectations of gaining some information, either good or bad. If Prairie Flower had, as I inferred from what Black George imparted, actually been in search of Charles Huntly, I could at once gain the result and extent of her operations and shape my own accordingly. With this view of the matter, as may readily be supposed, I felt no little anxiety to see her, and on no route to my thinking would I be more likely to find her than on the one I had chosen and was now pursuing.

Making the best of our way over the hills, we struck the Bear River on the third day from leaving Fort Hall.

This river, which takes its rise in the very heart of the mountain range to which it gives a name, presents the curious phenomenon of a stream running adverse ways, and nearly parallel to itself, for a distance of from one to two hundred miles. Beginning, as just stated, in the very center of the Bear River Mountains, it flows away northward on its devious course for a hundred and fifty or two hundred miles, and then, encircling a high ridge with the bend of an ox bow, runs southward nearly the same distance, enlarging with numerous tributaries, and emptying at last into the Great Salt Lake within fifty or seventy-five miles of its own head waters.

Formerly this stream was much resorted to by trappers, who here found beaver very numerous and mountain game in abundance. Beaver dams, in process of

decay, may here and there be seen at the present day—and, at rare intervals, a thriving settlement of the little fellows themselves—but, as Black George remarked, with a sigh of regret :

“It ain’t what it used to was, no how.”

Soon after we had camped, Black George, who ever had an eye to business, started out in search of game, and soon returned with the intelligence that “beaver sign was about,” and forthwith proceeded to get his traps, which he had brought along in his possibles.

“What are you going to do?” I inquired.

“Make ’em come, hoss—nothin’ short.”

As I had never witnessed the *modus operandi* of catching beaver, I expressed a desire to do so, which was responded to with :

“Come on, Bosson, and I’ll put ye through—I’ll be dog-gone ef I don’t !”

Taking our way to the river, which was here rather shallow, Black George led me down some two hundred yards, and then directed my attention to some small tracks made in the muddy bottom of the stream along the margin of the water.

“Them’s the sign, d’ye see ! and thar’s fur about, sartin, or this possum don’t know shucks.”

Saying this, the old mountaineer proceeded to set his traps, of which he had some five or six. Moistening a small stick in his “medicine,” as he termed it—an oily substance obtained from a gland of the beaver—he fastened it to the trap, and then placed the latter in the “run” of the animal, just under the edge of the water, securing it to a sapling on the bank by a small cord. Another cord led off from the trap several feet, and was attached to a “floating stick”—so called from its floating on the water—by which appendage the trapper, in case the beaver gets away with his property, is enabled to recover it.

“And now,” said I, when he had done, “what inducement has the animal to become your victim ?”

“Why he gits to be my meat, you mean ?”

“Exactly.”

“Wall, I’ll jest explanify—though mayhap I’ll not git

it out as scientiferic as some folks—for, as I said some time ago, edication never come in this child's line. Ye see, it's jest this: beaver's like I've hearn say women-folks was. He's got an orful cur'osity, and it gits him into bad snaps without his intendin' it. Ye see, he'll come along here arter a while, and he'll smell that thar 'medicine,' and think mayhap thar's another beaver about—leastways he'll want to know purty bad—and so he'll come smellin' round, and, afore he knows it, his foot gits into the trap and thar he is. Augh!"

Having delivered himself of this, Black George quietly continued his operations, till all his traps were set, and then together we returned to our camp.

On arriving there I found that the beaver mania had taken possession of Black George's companions, who were in consequence absent with like sinister designs against the harmless little fellows.

On returning with the old mountaineer in the morning, I soon discovered he had "made a raise," as he expressed it, "of three old uns and a kitten." The other trappers were somewhat successful also; so that on that fatal night no less than a dozen beavers lost their "run" forever.

Before raising camp, my mountain friends proceeded to skin the animals, scrape the inside of the pelts of fat and all superfluous matter, and then stretch them on hoops for drying—after which they were ready for packing. This latter is done by turning the fur inside, putting several together and fastening them with cords, when they are tightly pressed into the possibles of the trapper, and thus conveyed on mules to the rendezvous-market, which is sometimes in one place and sometimes in another.

The labor of the trapper is very severe, and his perils without number. Sometimes he traps on his own account—alone, or with two or three associates—and sometimes for a company. In the first instance he is known as the "free trapper"—in the second as the "hired hand."

In either case, however, his hardships are the same. He sets off to the mountains as soon as the spring rains are over, and there generally remains till the approach-

ing storms of autumn drive him to winter quarters, where his time is spent in all kinds of dissipation to which he is accessible. If he makes a fortune in the summer, he spends it in the winter, and returns to his vocation in the spring as poor as when he started the year previous ; and not unfrequently worse off ; for, if a "free trapper," ten to one but he sacrifices his animals in some drunken, gambling spree, and is forced to go out on credit, or as a "hired hand." He braves all kinds of weather in his business, and all kinds of danger, from the common accidents of the mountains, to his conflicts with wild beasts and wilder and more ferocious savages. But he is a philosopher, and does not mind trifles. So he escapes with whole bones, or even with life, he looks upon his hardships, encounters and mishaps, only as so much literary stock, to be retailed out to his companions over a warm fire, a euchre deck, and a canteen of whisky.

Seeking the best beaver regions, he scans carefully all the rivers, creeks and rivulets in the vicinity for "beaver sign," regardless of danger. If he finds a tree across a stream, he gives it close attention, to ascertain whether it is there by accident, by human design, or whether it is "thrown" by the animal of his search for the purpose of damming the water. If the first or second, he passes on ; if the last, he begins his search for the "run of the cutter." He carefully scrutinizes all the banks, and peers under them for "beaver tracks." If he finds any, his next examination is to ascertain whether they are "old" or "fresh." If the latter, then his traps are set forthwith, in the manner already shown.

In his daily routine of business he not unfrequently encounters terrible storms of rain or snow—the former sufficient to deluge him and raise rivulets to rivers—and the latter to bury him, without almost superhuman exertions, far from mortal eye, and there hold him to perish,

"Unwept, unhonored and unsung."

These are the least of his dangers. He is often attacked by wild beasts, when nothing but his presence of mind, his coolness and good marksmanship, can extri-

cate him from his difficulty; and yet he rarely fails to come off conqueror. Escaping these, he must be continually on his guard against his worst foe, the wily Indian; so that he can never approach a bush with the surety that a treacherous ball may not put a close to his mortal career, and all his hard earnings pass into the hands of an enemy he ever hates with the bitterness of concentrated passion. With all these dangers, hardships and vicissitudes, your genuine trapper loves his calling, would not be content to follow any other, and is in general a rough, jolly, dare-devil sort of a fellow, who not unfrequently attains to the appointed age of man, and at last "goes under," with all the stoicism of a martyr,

"With not a stone, and not a line,
To tell he e'er had been."

Continuing our course, but in a more easterly direction, we at length quitted the mountains and descended to a large, beautiful, rolling prairie, with little or no vegetation but short, buffalo grass.

Taking our way over this, we had been about half a day out, and were beginning to lose sight of the lower ranges of hills, when we heard a deep rumbling, like heavy thunder, or a distant earthquake, and our guide came to a sudden halt, exclaiming:

"Le diable!"

"Howly jabers! what is it, now?" cried Teddy.

"Hist!" exclaimed Black George. "I'll be dog-gone ef I don' think we're chawrd up this time, sure as sin!"

"What is it?" I echoed.

"Von grande stampede, by gar!" answered Pierre.

"Stampede of what, I pray?"

"Buffler," replied Black George.

"Where are they?"

"Yonder they is now—here a-ways they soon will be;" and as he spoke, he pointed over the plain with his finger.

Following the direction with my eyes, I beheld in the distance a cloud of dust, which rolled upward like a

morning fog, through which, and in which, I could occasionally catch a glimpse of the huge animals, as they bounded forward with railroad velocity.

"What is to be done?" I cried.

"Grin and bear it!" responded the old trapper.

"But we shall be trodden to death! See! they are coming this way!"

"Can't die younger!" was the cool rejoinder.

"But can we not fly?"

"Howly Moses!" shouted Teddy, worked up to a keen pitch of excitement; "it's fly we must, sure, as if the devil was afther us, barring that our flying must be did on baasts, as have no wings, now, but long legs, jist."

"What for you run, eh?" grinned the Frenchman. "Him catche you, by gar! just so easy as you catche him, von leetle, zemp—vot you call him—mosquito, eh?"

"It's no use o' showin' them critters 'our backs," rejoined Black George. "Heyar's what don't turn back on nothin' that's got ha'r."

"Well," continued I, "you may do as you please; but as for myself I have no desire to stand in my tracks and die without an effort."

Saying this, I wheeled my horse, and was just in the act of putting spurs to him, when Black George suddenly dashed up alongside and caught my bridle.

"See heyar, boy—don't go to runnin'—or you'll discomflumicate yourself oudaciously—you will, by thunder! Eh, Pierre?"

"Certainment, by gar!" answered the guide; and then both burst into a hearty laugh.

"What do you mean?" cried I, in astonishment, unable to comprehend their singular actions; and I turned to the other mountaineers, who were sitting quietly on their horses, and inquired if they did not think there was danger.

"Thar's al'ays danger," replied one, "in times like this here; but thar's no safety in runnin'!"

"For Heaven's sake! what are we to do, then? Stay here quietly and get run over?"

Black George gave a quiet laugh, and the Frenchman

proceeded to take snuff. This was too much for my patience. I felt myself insulted; and jerking away my rein, from the hand of the trapper, I exclaimed, indignantly :

"I do not stay here to be the butt of any party. Teddy, follow me !"

The next moment I was dashing over the prairie at the full speed of my horse, with the Irishman, to use a nautical phrase, close in my wake, whooping and shouting.

The direction we had taken was the same as that pursued by the running buffaloes; and we could only hope for ultimate safety by reaching some huge tree, rock, or other obstacle to their progress, in advance of them.

How far we would have to run to accomplish this, there was no telling; for, as far as the eye could reach ahead of us, we saw nothing but the same monotonous, rolling plain.

The beasts, thundering on in our rear, were so numerous, and their line so broad, that an attempt to ride out of their way, by turning to the right or left, could not be thought of, as the velocity of the animals would be certain to bring a wing upon us ere we could clear their lines.

There was nothing for it, then, but a dead race; and, I will be free to own, the thought of this fairly chilled my blood. Exposed as I had been to all kinds of danger, I had never felt more alarmed and depressed in spirits than now.

What could my companions mean by their indifference and levity? Was it possible that, having given themselves up for lost, the excitement had stupefied some and turned the brains of others? Horrible thought! I shuddered, and turned on my horse to look back.

There they stood, dismounted, rifles in hand, and, just beyond them, the mighty host still booming forward. Poor fellows! all hope with them is over, I thought; and, with a sigh at their fate, I withdrew my gaze and urged on my steed.

On, on we sped, for a mile or more, when I ventured another look behind me.

Judge of my surprise, on beholding a long line of buffaloes to the right and left, rushing away in different directions; while directly before me nothing was visible but my friends, who, on perceiving me look back, made signs for me to halt and wait for them.

I did so, and in a few minutes they came up laughing.

"Why, Bosson," said Black George, waggishly, "I hope as how you've run the skeer out o' ye by this time, for I'll be dog-gone ef you can't travel a few!"

"Oui, Monsieur," added Pierre, "vous 'ave von le plus grande—vot you call him—locomotion, eh?"

"But how, in the name of all that is wonderful, did you escape?" rejoined I.

"Jest as nateral as barkin' to a pup," answered Black George. "We didn't none on us hev no fear at no time; and was only jest playin' possum, to see ef we could make your ha'r stand—never 'specting', though, you was a-goin' to put out and leave us."

"But pray tell me how you extricated yourselves?" said I, feeling rather crestfallen at my recent unheroic display.

"Why, jest as easy as shootin'—and jest that, hoss, and nothin' else."

"Explain yourself!"

"Wall, then, we kind o' waited till them critters got up, so as we could see their peepers shine, and then we all burnt powder and tumbled over two or three leaders. This skeered them as was behind, and they jest sniffed, and snorted, and sot off ayther ways like darnation. It warn't nothing wonderful, that warn't, and it 'ud been onnateral for 'em to done anything else."

"I say, your honor," rejoined Teddy, with a significant wink, "it's like, now, we've made jackasses o' oursilves, barring your honor."

"Very like," returned I, biting my lips with vexation, "all but the barring."

The truth is, I felt much as one caught in a mean act, and I would have given no small sum to have had the joke on some one else.

I detected many a quiet smile curling the lips of my companions, when they thought I did not notice them;

and I knew by this they were laughing in their sleeves, as the saying is ; but, being in my service, did not care to irritate my feelings by a more open display.

It is very galling to a sensitive person to know he has made himself ridiculous, and is a private subject of jest with his inferiors. It is no use for one under such circumstances to fret, and foam, and show temper. No ! such things only make the matter worse. The best way is to come out boldly, own to the joke, and join in the laugh. Acting upon this, I said :

"Friends, I have made a fool of myself—I am aware of it—and you are at liberty to enjoy the joke to its full extent. But remember, you must not spread it ! and when we reach a station, consider me your debtor for a 'heavy wet' all around."

This proved a decided hit. All laughed freely at the time ; and that was the last I heard of it till I fulfilled my liquor pledge at Uintah Fort ; when Black George ventured the toast, "Buffle and a run," which was followed with roars of mirth at my expense ; and there the matter ended.

CHAPTER IX.

CAMP STORIES AND THE ATTACK.



RASSING Uintah Fort, which awakened many painful recollections of what had occurred since my former visit here in company with my lost friend, we took a southerly course, and, crossing Green River, continued over an undulating, mountainous country, to Grand River, and thence to the most northern range of the Green Mountains, where gush forth the head waters of the Arkansas and Rio Grande.

Here we came to a beautiful valley, shut in by high hills, through which flowed a limpid stream, whose banks

wore a velvet covering of rich, green grass and innumerable wild flowers. A little back from the stream, on either side, was a delightful grove, stretching away in rows of artificial regularity.

In fact, from what I saw, and the information I gathered from my companions, I have every reason to believe this valley was at one time a nobleman's park.

I said it was shut in by hills; but there was one outlet toward the west, where the streamlet flowed gently away between two ridges.

Entering through this pass, you are struck with the singular beauty of the spot; and not more so than by a huge pile of ruins on a gentle eminence away to the right.

Here, as tradition goes, once stood a famous castle, belonging to a Spanish nobleman, who, for some state intrigue, was exiled his country, but who subsequently flourished here in great power.

He had a beautiful daughter, to whom a descendant of the Aztecs paid court; but neither the father nor the daughter fancied the suitor, and his suit was rejected.

Enraged at this, the suitor swore revenge; and possessing power and influence over a barbarous race, he succeeded, by bribes and treachery, in accomplishing his fell design.

The lord of the castle, his daughter and attendants, all fell victims; and the mighty structure, touched by the devastating fingers of Time, at last became a heap of ruins.

Such is a brief outline of the tradition, which I give for the benefit of future romancers.

As we entered this ancient retreat, the bright sun of a hot July day was just beginning to dip below the line of the western horizon; and his yellow light, streaming along the surface of the meandering waters, gave them the appearance of a long stream of molten, quivering gold.

Everything in and about the place seemed to possess the charm of enchantment. Beautiful and merry songsters, of all hues, warbled sweet tunes among the branches of the trees, or amid the tall grass and flowers

beneath them. Here and there small animals of the hare species might be seen running to and fro, while the waters of the rivulet occasionally displayed the shiny sides of a mountain trout.

Take it all in all, to me the place seemed a second Eden ; and when I turned my eyes upon the old ruins, my imagination at once carried me far back into the dark ages of the past, and the strange tales I had heard seemed literally enacting before me.

"Thar's been a heap o' blood spilt here-a-ways, take one time with another," observed Black George, as, with our pipes in our mouths, we sat around the camp-fire in the evening.

"Faith, and it's mesilf, now," said Teddy, "that ud be afther saeing the spot as hasn't been likewise, in this haythen part of Christendom "

"Oui, Monsieur Teddy," rejoined the Frenchman. "Ha ! ha ! by gar sacre ! dat pe ver nice spoke—ver nice. You sall make von moche grande—vot you call him—oratore, eh ?"

"But tell us what you know," said I, addressing the old trapper, whom I was anxious to draw out in one of his marvelous tales.

"Well, hoss, I'll gin ye the gist of a spree I once had here, ef Teddy'll agree to tell a story when I'm done."

"What say you, Teddy?"

"Och, now, it's not me mother's child as was iver blist wid the gift o' gab ; but to make the time slip off asy, I'll do me trying of it, rather thin lose that of Mистер Black George, barring that I'd lose what I niver had, and that ud be lost twice, d'ye mind !"

"As how, Teddy?"

"Why, your honor, and sure wouldn't I lose the hearing the story towld, and the story itsilf besides ? and troth, wouldn't that be two ? and isn't two twice, now ?"

"Very good for you ; but come, George, go on with the tale !"

Here the old mountaineer took out his pipe, knocked out the ashes, put some of the weed into his mouth, and,

after twisting and turning himself into a comfortable position, thus began :

"Thar's none o' ye here, I s'pect, as knowed Ben Bose ; and the more's the pity ; for Ben was a screamer, he was, right out and out. He could eat more buffler meat, drink more whisky, chaw'r more 'bacca, cuss louder, and tell bigger lies, nor any white nigger this coon ever seed—and that's a dog-gone fact ! Mayhap you think as how I exaggertate ; but I ken jest prove all I've said, and more too. Why, I've seed Ben, afore now, when his meat bag war right smart empty, chaw'r up half a buffler, all wet down with about two gallon o' whisky, and then sw'ar, till all the trees round him ud git the ager, that ef he didn't git so'thin' to eat soon he'd hev to go a wolfin' with starvation. And as for lyin'—oh, he could tell sich lies, could Ben, and sw'ar to 'em so par-fict, that though you knowed all the time they was lies, you'd sort o' b'lieve 'em, and wouldn't care to do nothin' else ; for you'd kind o' say to yourself, ef they ain't facts they ort to be, and that's the same thing. Why Ben used to tell sich almighty lies, and stick to 'em so long, that he'd git to believin' 'em himself, he would—and then he'd quit 'em ; for he war never knowed to tell anything as he suspicioned bein' true ef he could help it. The only time this child ever hearn him tell a fact, was onc't in a joke, when he said he was the biggest liar on 'arth ; but he made up for that right sudden, by swearin' the next minnet he'd never told a lie in his life.

"But whar am I gittin' to ? Wall, ye see by this that Ben was one of the boys, he was, and nothin' else. Poor feller ! he went under at last like a sojer. He gin in the pint right out thar-a-ways, whar ye see the light shinin' on that big tree."

"Ah ! then he died here ?"

"Wall, he did," said the old trapper, with a sigh ; "but he died game, and that's so'thin'". It's how he went out I'm goin' to 'lighten ye ; but I'm goin' to make the story short ; for somehow these here old by-gones makes me feel watery like, and I never had much incline for water, no how. Augh !

"Ben was purty much of a gentleman, any how ; and

me and him, when we'd meet, used to come together like two pieces of wax, and stick to each other like darnation, ef not more. The last time I ever seed Ben, I got on his 'run' just back here a few mile. He was jest makin' his tracks out from Taos, and this coon war jest crossin' over from Bent's Fort. Me and him had two muleys apiece, and was both goin' out alone, and happ'd to meet jest whar two trails jine.

" 'How is ye?' sez he, 'and whar bound?'

" 'Why, I'm some,' I sez back ag'in, 'and out for a ventur'.'

" 'Jest from Bent's?'

" 'Nowhar else, hoss.'

" 'I'm from Taos. Let's splice and double the game. Augh!'

" So we jined in, and went talkin' 'bout this thing and that, and trying which could outlie t'other, till we got to this here valley and camped."

" 'What d'ye think o' this place, anyhow?' sez he.

" 'I reckon it's a few,' sez I.

" 'D'ye ever see any ghosts here?' sez he.

" 'Nary a ghost, hoss!' sez I.

" 'I hev,' sez he. 'I was campin' here one night, and had jest got ready to blind my daylight, when I happ'd to cast one over thar to that old castle, and may I be sot down for a liar ef I didn't see a live ghost standin' right on that big pile, all dressed in white, and lookin' orful serious right at me. At fust I tried to think it a opterkal collusion,' sez he; 'but then I knowed right off that ef I didn't see that I didn't see nothin'; and if I didn't see nothin', what in blazes did I see? Wall, arter squintin' at it,' sez he, 'till my eye-kivers got so heavy I had to put splinters under 'em to prop 'em up, I riz up on to my travelin' pins, and sot out on a explore, to see ef 'twas the ghost of a white man or Injin. On that,' sez he, 'the ghost got miffed, and, makin' jest one step, stood right plum beside me.

" 'Ben Bose,' sez the ghost, 'I want you.'

" 'And so does Old Nick,' sez Ben.

" 'Well, I'm him,' sez the ghost; and at that Ben sez

the thing jest turned black in the face, and looked orful skeerful.

“‘Hadn’t you better wait till I git ready?’ axed Ben.

“‘No,’ sez the old chap, ‘I want you now;’ and at that Ben sez he took hold on him, and his fingers felt hot as burnt pitch.

“‘Wall,’ sez Ben, ‘I jest clinched into him, and sich a tussle you never seed. Fust me and then Brimstone, and then Brimstone and me, for two mortal hours. But, by hokey, I licked!’ sez Ben; ‘and the feller mosied with a flea in his ear, and his tail hangin’ down like a licked puppy’s.’

“Now, boys,” continued Black George, “as I’ve said afore, Ben was the all-firedest liar on ‘arth, or else I mought a b’lieved so’tthin’ o’ this; for he hadn’t but jest done spinnin’ it, when bang, bang, bang—whizz, whizz, whizz—yehup! yeaho! whirp! come ringin’ in our ears, as ef the ‘arth was all alive with shootin’ Injins—and that’s a scripter, dog-gone fact, as I’m a gentleman! (Somebody gin me a chawr!—augh!)

“‘Oh, the infarnals!’ sez Ben, jumpin’ up and showin’ blood on his noddle. ‘I’m dead meat, sartin. But I’ll hev company along,’ sez he; and he ups and blazes away, and throwed the nigh one, as was comin’ up, right purty.

“‘Two on ‘em,’ sez I, ‘for a pint;’ and old Sweetlove gin the second one the double-up, instanter.

“‘Now, let’s dodge,’ sez Ben, ‘and keep our ha’r;’ and with that he grabbed hold o’ me, and both on us put out for the hills.

“But Ben ud got a settler, and felt top-heavy. He traveled ‘bout fifty yard, with my arm in hisn, and five yellin’ devils close behind us; and then he pitched on to me, and said he’d got to quit, and axed me to lift his ha’r* and keep it from the cussed Injins. I hated to do it like darnation—but thar wasn’t no help. Ef I didn’t, the skunks would; and so I outs with my butcher, and off come his sculp afore you could say beans.

“‘Thankee,’ sez Ben. ‘Good-bye, old hoss, and put out, or you’ll lose two on ‘em.’

* Take his scalp.

"I knowed he war right ; and though I hated to quit, I seed thar was no help, and I started for the old castle yonder, fodderin' Sweetlove as I went. I hadn't got fur, when I knowed by the yell the rascals had come up to him. They 'spected to make a raise thar, and two stopped for his fur, and the rest followed me. Ben was cunnin' though, and they didn't never tell what happ'd—them fellers didn't—I'll be dog-gone ef they did ! Ben kind o' played possum, and they thought he was gone under ; and so, while they was foolin' thar time, Ben had his eye skinned, burnt his pups'* powder, and throwed both on 'em cold right han'some, and then turned over and kicked the bucket hisself. I managed to plug another jest about then, and the other two scamps sot off instanter for a more sal-u-brious clime—they did—and ef you'd only seed 'em streak it, you'd a thought lightnin' warn't no whar.

"Why, jest to tell the clean truth, I'll be dog-gone ef they didn't travel so fast that a streak o' fire followed 'em, and the animals as had been snoozin' on thar way, waked up and looked out, and concluded the 'arth was burnin' most conscimptiously, and so put out arter them same flyin' humans. Fact, by Judas ! and ef you don't b'lieve it, you ken jest bile me for a persimmon and no questions axed."

"Oh, of course," said I, as Black George paused and looked around triumphantly, "we all believe it, and I should like to see the man that would not."

"Faith, now," chimed in Teddy, tipping me the wink, "the man that wouldn't belave all that asy, wouldn't belave that the moon's made o' green cheese, nor that Metooselah (blissings on his name of scripiter mimory !) was twice as big as a maating-house."

"Ha ! ha ! ver fine !" chimed in the Frenchman, rubbing his hands and giving a peculiar shrug. "I am ver moche delight. I sall pelieve him till I pe von—vot you call him—gray beard, eh !"

The other mountaineers laughed, winked at one another, but made no reply ; and Black George resumed, with all the gravity of a parson :

"Wall, sence you b'lieve it, I don't see no use as I'll hev to prove it, and that's so'thin' gained. Wall, when I seed the field was cl'ar, I jest mosied back to Ben, to see how he'd come out, for then I didn't know. I shuffled up to him, and thar I seed the varmints lyin' by his side, clean meat and nothin' else, and Ben Bose as dead nor a biled kitten. I felt kind o' orful for a while, and had to play the squaw a lectle, jest for old acquaintance's sake.

"When I'd rubbed the water out o' my spy-glasses, I sot to work, dug a hole, and kivered Ben over decent, at least a foot below wolf-smell. Then I went a ha'r raisin', and lifted all the skunks' top-knots, took all thar muskets and powder, and sot down to my lone camp-fire, feelin' as used up and womanish as ef I'd shuk with the ager a month. The only feel-good I had that night, was hearin' the infarnal wolves tearin' the meat off o' them dirty scamps' bones.

"The next mornin' I sot on ag'in, and took on Ben's muleys, and it was a purty considerable time afore I made another trail in this here valley. Thar, you've got the meat o' the story, and I'm done—augh!"

Though more familiar with mountain life and all its rough scenes than when I first heard the old trapper relate his adventures, yet the tale he had just told, in his rude, off-hand way, produced many painful feelings.

The story, in the main, I believed to be true—at least that part which related to the death of the trapper—and I could not avoid some very unpleasant reflections.

Who was Ben Bose? and how came he here? Had he any near and dear relatives? Ay, perchance he had a mother—a sister—who knows but a wife and children?—all of whom loved him with a pure affection. He had been driven, it might be, by the stern arm of necessity, to gain a living for himself and them among the wild fastnesses of the mountains. He had toiled and struggled, perhaps braved dangers and hardships, with the bright hope of one day returning to them, to part no more in life.

And they, all ignorant of his untimely fate, had possibly been—nay, might be now—anxiously looking for

his return. Alas, if so, they must forever look in vain! No news of him, perhaps, would ever reach their ears—and certainly no Ben Bose would ever again appear. Should they venture, however, to make inquiry among the trappers who had known him, what painful tidings would the common brief rejoinders, “he’s gone under,” or “been rubbed out,” convey to them, and how lacerate their sinking hearts! Poor fellow! Here he slept his last sleep, unheeding and unheeded, his memory forgotten, or recalled only on an occasion like this as a fire-side pastime.

“Alas,” sighed I, “what an unenviable fate! and how many hundred poor human beings like him are doomed to share it!”

I was recalled from my ruminations by hearing clamors for a story from Teddy, who, now that Black George had told his, seemed but little inclined to favor us.

“Remember your promise,” said I, joining in with the others.

“Faith,” answered Teddy, resorting to his peculiar habit, when puzzled or perplexed, of scratching his head; “faith, now, gintlemen, if ye’ll allow a poor body like mesilf to obsarve, it’s me mother’s own son as is thinking it’s a mighty tight fix I’m in. Troth, ye axes me for a story, and it’s hardly one that mesilf knows to tell yees! Och! I have it now!” he exclaimed, his eyes brightening with a sudden thought; “I have it now, claan at me fingers’ inds! I’ll tell yees how I comed to lave ould Ireland—the swaat land o’ murphies and murdering fine ladies—bliss their angel sows, ivery baastly one on ’em! barring the baastly part, now, which I only mintoned by way of smoothing the sintence.”

“Yes, yes, give us the yarn,” cried a voice; “and don’t spin it too long, for it’s gittin’ late.”

“Ay, Teddy,” I added, “I think that will do—only make it short.”

“By gar,” rejoined Pierre, having recourse to his box, “I think so, Monsieur. Cut him off so—von, two, tree feet—and zen him be von ver exsallent good, eh? Je le crois.”

“Will, ye sae, thin, gintlemen,” resumed Teddy, “to

begin at the beginning, as Father Murphy used to say whin he wint to carve a chicken tail foremost, I was born in ould Ireland, not a thousand miles from Cor-r-k, iayther ways. Me father (pace to his ashes, barring I niver saan the proof that he was me father, and there was dispute about it), was a gintleman laborer, as had plenty to do all his life and little to ate. He loved whisky, the ould chap, spaking riverintly; and one day he took it into his head to die, by token as he said there wasn't air enough for iverybody to brathe, and he'd jist sacrifice himself a marthyr for the good of others.

"Will, me mother, she became a widdy in coorse, and took on mighty bad about her Saint Denis, as she called me dead father—though it's little of a saint as she thought him whin living—and so, to drown her sorrow, she took to the bothel too, and soon after died spaachless, calling for wather, wather, the ounly time I'd iver heerd her mintion it, and by token o' that I knowed she was uncanny.

"Will, gintlénen, ye sae, by raason of both me parents dying, I was lift a hilpless infant orphan of fourteen, widout father or mother, or a shilling in me pocket, or a divil of a pocket in me coat, barring that it wasn't a coat at all, at all, ounly rags sowed thegither, jist. Me father's and mother's estate comprehinded ounly a bed, some pots and kithles, two broken stools, and a table as had its legs cut off for kindling wood. So, ye sae, that was soon sittled; and thin I was lift a poor, houseless wanderer, widout a place to go to, or a relation in the wide wor-r-ld, barring three brothers as was away, an uncle, two aunts, and about a dozen cousins, all poorer nor meself. Will, I took to crying for a living, and a mighty nice time I had on't, till one day Father Murphy come along and axed me would I like to come and live wid him. Faith, now, an' maybe it wasn't long saying yis I was.

"Now's you're afther having a short story, I'll skip over four years, and till yees what turned up thin, by way of variety.

"The praast, Father Murphy, ye sae, had a beauthifull niece, as was jist me age, barring that she was a couple

o' years younger. Now ye must know I iver had a fondness for the female sex, and I kind o' took to liking Kathleen by raason of natheral instinct. And Kathleen, the darling! she sort o' took to liking me betimes—more by token I was a dacent body, and she hadn't iny one bether to like; and so, betwaan us, we both thought about each other waking, and dramed about 'em in our slaap. Now divil a word did the praast know of it, at all, at all, and that was all the bether for the pair of us.

"At last I got to making love to her, and tilling her she was too swaat a being to be living all alone by herself jist; and that if her poor parints should be took away, like mine was, and she become a poor orphan like meself, what would she be afther doing for a protictor, and all thim things? She cried, she did, and she sez:

"'Teddy,' sez she, 'what would become o' me?'

"'It's not knowing,' I sez, 'and it's a mighty har-r-d thing to go by guess work on sich occasions.'

"At that she cried the more, by token her inner faalings was touched, and axed me would I contrive a way to git her out o' her throubles.

"'Ah, faith,' sez I, all of a sudden, 'I have it now!'

"'What is, Teddy, dear!' sez she.

"'Och! come to your Teddy's arms, and he'll be father, and mother, and victuals and drink to yees, my own swaat Kathleen!' I sez.

"Ah, the darling!" pursued Teddy—"blissings on her sowl, be it where it will! and pace to her ashes, if she's dead, which I'm not knowing, and hoping conthra-wise—she fill right into me arms, and comminced crying jist like wather dripping through a sieve. And thin, ye sae, I cried too, more by token o' saaing her cry than that I felt bad like, at all, jist. Will, I wiped me eyes wid me sleeve, and had jist begun to say comfortable things to her, whin who should happen along but the praast, her uncle!

"'Och, ye spalpeen! and what is it ye're at there, ye villain?' sez he.

"At this Kathleen give an awful scream, and rin for the house, laving me alone to fight the mather out. I

felt mighty small jist thin, ye'd better belave, and wished wid all me heart an arthquake would open and swaller the pair of us.

"I saan the praast was in a dangerous timper, and I knowed something was coming, asy as squaaling to a pig. But I'll not provoke his riverince, I sez to mesilf, or he'll jist murther me outright, widout judge or jury.

"'Who are ye?' sez he, coming up and taking me by the collar of me coat, barring that me coat had n'o collar, and I stood in me shirt sleeves, jist. 'Who are ye?' sez he; and thin he shook me till me teeth rattled.

"'I'm Teddy O'Lagherty, your riverince,' sez I.

"'Ye're a baastly dog!' sez he.

"'Troth, and so was me father before me,' sez I; 'and hisn before that;' for I wanted to plase him.

"'Ye're a blaggard!' sez he.

"'That comes by nathur,' sez I.

"'Ye're a scoundrel—a villain—a maan, contimptible spalpeen!' sez he.

"'Sure, and that comes by associations,' sez I.

"At this Father Murphy got as rid in the face as a baat, and I thought he would swaller me widout cooking or buther.

"'What was yees adoin'g here wid Kathleen?' sez he.

"'Loving her, your riverince,' sez I.

"'And how dare you love sich as she?' sez he.

"'Troth, and I'm thinking her as good as mesilf, your riverince,' I sez.

"At that I thought he'd choke himsilf, he held his grip so tight upon his own throat. Jabers! but it was rejoicing I was that it wasn't mesilf's he fingered that a ways.

"'Teddy,' sez he, afther a bit, and spaking more calm like, though I knowed the divil was behind it all: 'Teddy, I'm goin' to have yees whipped to death, and thin sint away for a baastly vagabone, to arn yees own living in the cowld world!' sez he.

"'Jist as plases your riverince,' sez I. 'But, sure,

yē'll be afther knowing I've done many worse things than love the swaat Kathleen, blissings on her sowl !'

" 'And do ye raaly love her?' sez he, in a softer voice.

" 'Och, your riverince, and is it meself as loves good eatables, now ?'

" 'Will, thin,' sez he, 'for the sake of me niece, as is the apple o' me eye, I'll pardon yees, on one condition.'

" 'And, sure, what might that be, your riverince?' sez I.

" 'That ye'll lave the counthry, and niver come into it agin,' sez he.

" 'What,' sez I, faaling me anger rising, 'and lave darling Kathleen all alone by hersilf, widout a pro-tictor ! Be jabers, Father Murphy, it's me own mother's son as ud sae me own head cut off first, and thin I wouldn't.'

" 'What!' sez he, gitting his dander riz agin ; 'and does yees dare to talk that a ways to me, as has raised yees from poverty to be me own sarving man, and gin ye the bist of ivery thing as was lift whin we and the pigs had all done ? Say that to me face, as has been a father to yees, ye ungrateful yarlet ? I'll have yees horse-whipped out of town, so I will !'

" 'And if ye does,' sez I, 'I'll staal around and rin off wid Kathleen, as sure's me name's Teddy O'Lagherty, and Dennis O'Lagherty was me father'—which wasn't so sure, d'ye mind ! but Father Murphy didn't know that.

" This put him to thinking agin ; and afther a bit he sez, quite amiable like :

" 'An' sure you wouldn't be afther doing that, now, to one as has trated ye iver wid sich respect, Mистер O'Lagherty ?' sez he.

" 'Howly Moses !' thinks I ; 'what's a coming now ? Ayther a mighty sto-r-m, or sunshine, sure—for I'd niver hearn the praast spaak that ways afore.

" 'Mистер O'Lagherty,' sez he, agin, 'I love ye.'

" 'Faith,' sez I, 'and it's glad I am to hear the likes, more by raason ye niver showed the faaling at all, at all.'

" 'Will, ye think of gitting Kathleen—but it's all in your eye,' sez he. 'She don't care for ye, me son !'

“ ‘That’s a lie!’ sez I—‘begging your riverince’s pardon for spaaking plain Inglish!’

“ ‘Father Murphy bit his lips, and his two eyes looked jist like fire-balls, they did.

“ ‘Will,’ sez he, sez Father Murphy, ‘we’ll let that pass : but she can niver be yourn, Teddy, by raason of her being bargained to another.’

“ ‘That alters the case,’ sez I.

“ ‘It does,’ sez he. ‘Now, ye sae, me son, ye can’t make nothing by staying round here—not a bit of it—and as I maan to do the gintaal by yees, I’d like to be knowing what ye’d ax to lave the counthry, and have the money down?’

“ ‘And, sure, where’d I go?’ sez I.

“ ‘To Amirica,’ sez he.

“ ‘Will, I’d al’ays hearn of Amirica—and what a blissed counthry it was for liberty, ladies and poor folks—and the notion plazed me; and besides, I knowed what the praast said about my niver gitting Kathleen was throe. So I thinks it over a wee bit, and sez :

“ ‘Why, Father Murphy,’ sez I, ‘saaing it’s you, and you’re a gintleman I respict, I’ll go, if ye’ll give me dacent clothes, pay me passage out, and five pounds to dhrink your riverince’s health.’

“ ‘He wanted to baat me down; but I saan I had him, and I swore divil a step would I stir widout he’d do my axing. At last sez he :

“ ‘Teddy, I’ll do it, if ye’ll agree to start right off, and niver sae Kathleen agin—otherwise I won’t.’

“ ‘It’s har-r-rd, so it is,’ sez I; but I was afeard he’d back out if I didn’t accept soon, and so I towld him, ‘It’s a bargain, your riverince.’

“ ‘Stay a minnet, thin,’ sez he; and he rin into the house and brought me out ten sovereigns. ‘These’ll pay everything,’ sez he; ‘and so lave now, and niver show your dirthy face here agin, or I’ll have yees up for staaling.’

“ ‘Troth,’ sez I, feeling like a lord, wid me hands on the goold, ‘it’s not throubled wid me ye’ll be agin soon! The top o’ the morning to your riverince!’ and so I left him.

"Will, to wind up, I comed to Amirica, and spint all me fortune, and then wint to work and earned more money, and thin wint thraveling to sae what I could find, whin, blissings on me luck (turning to me), I fill into your honor's sarvice, for which good bit of accident I'm mighty glad now ! That's me story."

At the moment Teddy concluded, and ere a single comment or remark had escaped our lips, a frightful volley of musket balls flew round us like hail ; and one of our party, springing up with a yell, fell back a corpse.

CHAPTER X.

A DESPERATE FIGHT WITH INDIANS.

"NDIANS !" was the simultaneous cry which burst from our lips, as each man grasped his rifle and sprung to his feet.

"Tree, boys !" cried Black George, just as a series of terrific yells resounded on all sides, and a host of dusky figures were seen bearing down upon us from every direction but one, which seemed providentially left open for our safety.

Toward this, the only point of compass possible for us to escape without a personal conflict, we fled precipitately, and soon reached a small clump of trees, which afforded us immediate protection, leaving our dead comrade in possession of the savages.

With yells of triumph a dozen of the latter rushed up to the unfortunate trapper, and one of the number instantly tore off his scalp, while several others buried their knives in his body to make sure of their victim.

Meantime the rest of the party, which consisted of some thirty in all, made for our retreat, uttering demoniac yells of barbarous exultation, doubtless fancying us an easy prey.

"Now, boys," cried Black George, in a stentorian voice, "every man pick a Injin, and guv the skunks thunder!"

His advice did not need a repetition; for scarcely were the words out of his mouth, when crack went our six rifles; and, almost miraculous to record, six of the foremost assailants rolled howling in the dust—each man, by a friendly providence, having selected a separate target with a fatal aim.

This was a result as unlooked for by us as alarming to our foes, who suddenly halted and rent the air with howls of rage and dismay.

While it staggered them, it gave us courage, and in the moment of their indecision and our triumph the voice of Black George was heard shouting the inspiring words:

"Wall done, boys! Foller me, and let us bark our pups, and butcher at close quarters!"

Saying this, he sprung forward with a yell, a proceeding we all imitated; and before the astonished savages were fully aware of what was taking place, they found us in their midst, shouting, shooting and cutting, with a daring, activity and ferocity they had probably never seen equaled.

So suddenly had we become assailants in turn, and so vigorously did we press upon them, that they instantly wavered, became confused, and, after a slight resistance, took to flight, leaving four more of their number to keep company with the first unfortunate six.

Being all more or less experienced in Indian warfare, we were consequently wise enough not to follow them, well knowing they would return to the charge as soon as pressed into cover.

Both of Black George's companions had been wounded in the *melee*, but not dangerously, and we now congratulated ourselves with a triumphant shout on our success.

"Reckon they'll stay put till we kin butcher and raise these here dogs' ha'r," said the old trapper; and forthwith all set to work, save myself, in killing the wounded and scalping the slain.

When this bloody business was over, Black George observed :

"This heyar coon wonders how the rascals feels now ! Mayhap they've got a notion in thar heads that they're some in a b'ar-fight. Sarved 'em right, the blasted possums ! What business had they to be pitching into us, when we was tellin' stories and troublin' nobody ! Augh !"

"By gar, I tink so !" added the Frenchman, as he gave his olfactory organ an extra dose and his shoulders an unusually vigorous shrug. "Ha ! ha ! Monsieur Blake Shorge—you say ver moche true—sarve him right. Certainment, he got von most ver good exsallant—vot you call him—drubbing, eh ? Ha ! ha ! certainment."

"Och, now, but didn't the blaggards look a wee bit astonished, the spalpeens !" joined in Teddy. "Faith ! but I thought whin they rin, maybe as it was a race they was rinning for whisky or the likes."

"Well," said I, "we have been fortunate so far, that is certain ; and now let us take care for the future. Load quick, my friends, and let us bring our animals together, or the Indians may rally and dash upon them and leave us in a bad condition."

"Right, boy !" cried Black George, with a start : "I'd forgot. What an old fool I is sometimes ! Quick ! or the skunks will head us—for I knows 'em of old."

Fortunately for us the Indians had not as yet made a seizure of our horses—(which, at the time of the attack, were quietly feeding in the valley, but were now running to and fro and snuffing the air)—thinking, I suppose, that victory for them was certain; and well knowing that an attempt to take the animals first would create an alarm and perhaps defeat their design of making us their victims. Our possibles, too, had escaped them, probably from being concealed under the brushwood collected for our fire, and also from their being put to flight so suddenly.

All these were certainly matters for congratulation ; and hurriedly removing our property beyond the fire-light, I ordered Teddy and Pierre to guard it with their

lives ; while the rest of us, having reloaded our rifles, set off to collect our animals.

We had not been any too soon in this matter ; for the Indians, having recovered from their first alarm and confusion, were now espied dodging from tree to tree, with the evident intention of getting between us and the beasts and capturing the latter.

"Heyar's a fix," observed Black George, making a halt. "Ef we go for'ard the cussed varmints will pick us off and make meat on us ; and ef we stay here-a-ways, they'll cotch our critters and leave us to foot it. I'll be dog-gone ef it don't look like a dilemmer, as I hearn a scholard say onc't—that's a fact."

It was a dilemma, sure enough, and how to act was a matter of great moment. We could not charge upon the savages as we had done before, for they had "treed" in every direction, and, as Black George observed, would be sure to pick us off singly. To lose our animals was not to be thought of, for this would in a measure place us in their power. What was to be done ? Several propositions were made by one and another, but all in turn rejected as being impracticable.

Meantime the Indians were not inactive ; and though the night was without moon, we could occasionally perceive a figure flitting before us like a shadow, and the circle they had made around our horses gradually narrowing. It was a time for action of some kind, and yet we stood irresolute.

At length the old trapper suggested that we should separate, and each shift for himself in the manner best calculated to annoy our foes. This was the best plan as yet proposed, and was instantly adopted.

We had already begun to put it into execution, when, to our astonishment, a small body of horsemen, with loud yells, suddenly dashed out from a distant thicket, and, separating, bore down upon the rear of our enemies.

The next moment we heard the sharp crack of firearms, mingled with the shouts of the assailants, and yells of terror from the surprised Indians, who instantly took to flight in all directions.

In their confusion a portion ran toward us, and were received by a well-directed volley, which wounded one, killed two, and increased the alarm of the survivors, who instantly changed their course and fled toward the western hills, only to find their flight intercepted by an occasional horseman.

"Don't know who fights for us," cried Black George. "and don't care a kick—but know they's some—and so let's arter 'em, and disconfumicate the infarnal skunks all we kin."

Saying this, the trapper set forward in eager chase of the flying foe, an example we all followed, and for the next quarter of an hour the valley presented an indescribable scene of confusion and excitement.

Nothing of life could be seen but flying fugitives, hotly pursued by a bitter enemy, whose only mercy was instant death; and nothing heard but shrieks, yells, groans and shouts of triumph—these from victors, those from vanquished—together with the constant sharp crack of fire-arms, and the clashing of knives, as here and there two met in personal and deadly conflict. To use a military phrase, the rout was total, the enemy badly beaten, and the victorious skirmishers only withdrew from the field of conflict for want of a foe.

During the *melee* we had all become mixed up; and but for the distinguishing difference of color and equipments, we might, owing to the darkness, have made sad havoc with our best friends.

But the new-comers were whites, and there was no difficulty in distinguishing between them and the savages. Who they were, and how they had come here so opportunely for us, were enigmas I had no time nor opportunity to solve till the affray was over. Whoever they were, however, they were brave to a fault—if I may call that courage a fault which is reckless of self-preservation—and they fought like demons.

One of their party, whom I took to be the leader, displayed an agility, intrepidity and fierceness I had never seen equaled but once. Mounted on a fiery steed, which seemed to comprehend his slightest wish, he rushed among the frightened savages; and twice, as he passed

near me, did I observe him bend from his saddle, seize the scalp-lock of an Indian, and stab him in the neck, only slightly checking the speed of his horse.

A long, loud shout at last attested our complete victory; when I, in company with my companions, approached our deliverers, to return our sincere thanks for their timely aid.

Moving up to the personage I supposed to be the leader, who now sat quietly on his horse, surrounded by a dozen stalwart figures, all mounted, I said :

"Whom have I the honor to thank for this invaluable assistance at a point of time so critical to us?"

"Why, as to thanks," answered the one addressed, in a voice that seemed familiar to me, "I don't 'spect thar's any needed; but ef you thank anybody, thank all—for every man's done his duty, and nothing more."

"I fancy I know your voice," I rejoined, "but I cannot see your features."

"Well, it struck me as I'd heard your's afore," returned the intrepid horseman; and he bent forward in his saddle for a closer scrutiny of my person.

At this moment Black-George came up, and, casting one glance at the speaker, exclaimed :

"Kit Carson, or I'm a liar! Reckon you knows old Black George, don't ye?" and in an instant the two were shaking hands with the hearty familiarity of old friends.

"Kit Carson!" cried I, in surprise. "Well, sir, I might have known it was you, from your manner of fighting;" and in turn I seized his hand with one of my strongest grips.

"You have a leetle the advantage of me yet," said Kit, when I had done.

"I presume you have not forgotten Frank Leighton, and the fight at Bitter Cottonwood?" I replied.

"Good heavens! is it indeed you? Why, I thought you war rubbed out thar, and I've never heard anything of you sence. I'm glad to see you, sir;" and an extra grip and shake of the hand convinced me he meant what he said. "I'll have a talk with you, by-and-by; but just

now we mountain men hev got a right smart chance at scalping—after which I'm at your service."

While most were occupied in the barbarous practice (I can never call it by a milder term), of scalping the slain, I called Teddy, Pierre and one or two others to my aid, and proceeded to collect and picket the frightened animals.

This was no easy task, and it was at least an hour before order and quiet were again restored.

In the meantime the Indians were scalped and rifled of everything valuable, and then left to feed the wolves, some of which had already begun their feast, and were fast being joined by others.

Of the slain, we counted in all twenty-three carcasses ; so that it was evident that only a few, perhaps only five or six, escaped, and these doubtless more or less wounded. Of my party, not one was injured in this last affray ; but several of the horsemen had received cuts and stabs, though none of a dangerous character.

When we had all collected around the camp-fire, the wounded were looked to, and their wounds dressed as well as circumstances would allow.

This done, we proceeded to bury the mountaineer, who had been killed, as the reader will remember, at the onset.

As soon as all these matters were arranged, we squatted down in a circle round the fire, to talk over the events of the last two hours.

I now had an opportunity of conversing with Carson, which I eagerly embraced. I informed him, in brief, of all that had occurred since we last met, and listened to a hasty recital of his own adventures, the principal part of which referred to Fremont's first expedition, and is already before the public.

He said that, after parting with Fremont, he had been engaged to conduct a party to California, and was on his return to St. Louis, by way of Uintah Fort, St. Vrain, and Fort Laramie, when, stopping at the first mentioned, he found the present party of adventurers anxious to obtain a guide to Taos, and thence to Santa Fé, and that they had induced him to accompany them

as far as Taos. He said they had been on our trail for some time, but had not come in sight of us until the present evening, when, camping just the other side of one of the surrounding hills, he, in a short ramble, had accidentally discovered our camp-fire and had determined on joining us in the morning. The attack on us by the Indians had been heard, and as soon as possible thereafter the whole party had come to our aid, with what result the reader knows.

He further added that it was rumored that Fremont had begun his second expedition, and was even now on his route westward by way of Bent's Fort—that he was anxious to join him—and that if an arrangement could be effected to do without him, he would in the morning cross over to the valley of the Arkansas and take a direct course for Bent's.

In answer to my inquiries concerning Prairie Flower and her tribe, he said he had not met with any of them since the battle of Bitter Cottonwood, but that he had heard of their being in this part of the country quite recently, and was inclined to believe them somewhere in the neighborhood of Taos at the present time. With regard to my friend, he expressed much sorrow for his loss, but could give me no information concerning him.

I was now more than ever anxious to find the Mysterious Tribe; for something whispered me that Prairie Flower had been in search of my friend—or at least was now with her tribe on that errand—or, if neither of these surmises should prove correct, that I could perhaps prevail upon them to assist me. At all events I determined on finding them as soon as possible, and accordingly resolved to start at daylight and push through to Taos with all haste.

Busy thoughts prevented me from sleeping on that eventful night, and at the first tinge of morning light I awoke my companions for the journey.

As we all had one destination, the party of Carson consented to part with him and join mine; and shaking my hand, with a hearty prayer for my success, he set off alone over the mountains, while we continued down the valley of the Rio Grande.

(CHAPTER XI.

GAIN TIDINGS OF MY FRIEND.



Our party was now quite formidable, we had no fears of again being attacked so long as we remained together.

On the fourth day from quitting the valley described in the previous chapter, we entered the small village of Taos.

Here I found a collection of all nations and colors, consisting of trappers, hunters, traders, adventurers, and so forth.

Mingling with all classes, I at once proceeded to make inquiries regarding the present whereabouts of the Great Medicine Tribe, and also if any had seen or heard of a certain young man (giving a full description of Huntly) being taken prisoner by the Indians or Mexicans.

To my first inquiry, I received from several the answer, that a singular tribe of Indians, among whom was a beautiful female, had been seen in the vicinity within a few weeks; but where they now were, or in what direction, none could tell. As to the latter, each replied, with a shake of the head, that he could tell me nothing. It was not an uncommon thing, they informed me, for a white man, an adventurer, to be taken, robbed, held for ransom, knocked on the head, or sold into slavery; but no one remembered hearing of, or seeing, such a person as I described.

To me this news produced great disappointment; for, from some cause, which I cannot explain, I had been sanguine of getting information of Huntly so soon as I should arrive at Taos. Here, then, was a complete overthrow of my most ardent hopes! and I now felt keenly the weakness of the foundation on which I had reared my expectations. I might pass a long life in a wearisome

and dangerous search, and yet be no wiser concerning Huntly's fate at last.

There was still a faint hope that Prairie Flower, who I doubted not had gone south with her tribe for this purpose, had gained some information of him ; and at once I determined on finding her, with the additional resolve, that, should my surmises prove correct, and she had failed also, to set out on my return forthwith.

The day following my arrival in Taos, I was passing along one of the streets, pondering upon these matters, when I chanced to meet an old mountaineer, whom I did not remember having seen before.

Determined to leave no stone unturned, I accosted him with the same inquiry I had made of the others.

He stopped, looked at me attentively a moment, as if to comprehend my questions, and then, in a musing, half-soliloquizing manner, replied :

" 'Bout the Injins, don't know—think I've seed sich—won't be sartin—don't like to be sartin when I ain't. Yes ! think I hev seed 'em—yes, know I hev—but it war two year ago, and away up north a thundering ways. Fact. 'Bout the other chap, don't know—yes—no—stop—let me see—y-e-s, I reckon—ain't sartin—what was he like ?"

Here I proceeded to give a description of my friend, with what conflicting feelings of hope and fear I leave the reader to imagine. In fact my voice became so tremulous that several times I was forced to stop and put my hand to my throat to prevent as it were my heart from strangling me.

" Git cool, and jest say that thar over agin," rejoined the other, when at length I tremblingly paused for his answer.

I repeated it twice, before he seemed satisfied.

" Now," said he, " I'll think—let me see !" and he deliberately proceeded to take up each point of my description, and apply it to some person he had seen, making his own comments as he went along. " Slim and graceful—let me see !—yes—no—y-e-s—rather reckon he was—know it—fact. 'Bout twenty-three—stop—let me think !—yes—reckon he mought be—know he was—sar-

tin. Good face—han'some featur's—stop—a—y—e—s—know it—settled."

Thus he went on until I found my patience completely exhausted, and was about to interrupt him, when he suddenly exclaimed :

"Seen him, stranger, sartin as life—know I has."

"Where? where?" cried I, breathlessly, grasping his hand.

"San Domingo."

"When?"

"'Bout a year ago!"

"God be thanked! You are sure?"

"Sartin, or I'd never said it."

"Well! well!—what became of him?"

"It's more'n I can say—s'pect he war made a slave. A rummy old Greaser had him, and wanted to sell or git him ransomed. He axed too high, and nobody traded. I pitied the poor feller, but I hadn't no money, and thar warn't no Yankees thar then to help me out in takin' him. Old Greaser went sothe; and some I axed shuk thar heads, and said that old scamp war a robber chief and had lots o' help close by. All I know, stranger."

"But do you think he is alive now?"

"Can't say, ye see, 'cause don't know. Never say what don't know. Anything more to ax, stranger?"

"Nothing that you can answer," I replied; and thanking him kindly for his information, I placed a gold coin in his hand, and hurriedly left him, to seek out my companions—my spirits, so lately depressed, now buoyant and bounding.

The party which had joined mine at the valley, had not yet quitted Taos; and calling all together, I proceeded to lay before them my joyful intelligence.

When I had done, Black George gave a shout, Teddy a whoop, Pierre shrugged his shoulders and doubled his dose of snuff, and every one expressed his delight in his own peculiar way.

The Rovers—so our new companions termed themselves—were nearly all young men from the States, who had come West more for adventure than speculation; and as I had become a favorite with them in the short

time of our acquaintance, they at once volunteered me their assistance—an offer which I accepted with tears of gratitude.

Ordering out our animals, we mounted and set forward immediately, and, although the day was partly advanced, succeeded in reaching Santa Cruz about nightfall.

By noon of the next day we rode into Santa Fé—a place of much importance and notoriety, from being centrally located on the great caravan route from Missouri to Southern California.

At the time of which I write, Santa Fé contained some four or five thousand inhabitants, and was the emporium of the Northern trade between New Mexico and Missouri. It was anything but an agreeable place, however—its inhabitants being mostly made up of the off-scourings of the earth—without religion, morality, or any other noble quality. To gamble, steal, rob and murder, were among the refined amusements of this most worthy set. To make matters still worse, there had recently been some difficulty between the Mexicans and the citizens of the United States, and on both sides existed a bitter hostility, which was productive of the most violent crimes. It was dangerous for any one to traverse the streets alone, particularly after nightfall, for at every corner he turned he knew himself in danger of assassination. The Indians here generally sided with the Mexicans, and looked upon all Yankees as their worst enemies.

Such was the state of affairs at Santa Fe on my arrival; and the same inimical feeling, to a greater or less extent, prevailed in all the adjacent towns.

As myself and party had no desire to quarrel with any one, we took care to be civil, always together, well armed, and to mind our own business on all occasions, and in consequence we fortunately escaped without molestation.

Making several inquiries in Santa Fé, and gaining nothing further of Huntly or the Mysterious Tribe, we pursued our course southward through Cinega to San Domingo.

Here the story of the old trapper was so far confirmed, that several persons remembered having seen the notorious robber, Gonzalez, in possession of a handsome young prisoner, whom he was anxious to dispose of, declaring he could not find it in his heart to kill him, and could not afford to part with him without recompense; that no one there being disposed to purchase him, he had gone further south; but as to what had since become of him none could afford me any information.

In answer to my inquiry concerning Prairie Flower, I learned that some time ago she had been seen in this vicinity with her tribe—that she had made inquiries similar to mine, and that all had departed southward.

This news almost made me frantic with joy. Huntly, I argued, was living; Prairie Flower, like some kind angel, had gone to his rescue; and it might be that even now he was free and enjoying her sweet companionship. The joyful thought, as I said, nearly drove me mad with excitement; and all my olden hopes were not only revived, but increased by faith to certainties.

Hurrying forward to San Bernilla, on the Rio Grande, I heard nearly the same tale as at San Domingo; and following down the river to Torreon, I listened to its repetition—and at Valencia, Nutrias and Alamilla likewise.

At Valverde, the next village below the last mentioned, I could gain no intelligence whatever.

This led me to think Gonzalez had disposed of his prisoner between the two villages—or, what was just as probable, had taken another course.

For what I knew, he might have crossed the Rio Grande and struck off into the Sierra de los Mimbres—a mountain chain only a few miles to the west of us—whose lofty, snow-covered peaks rose heavenward to a vast height, and had been distinctly visible to us for several days.

If he had taken this direction, the chances of tracing him successfully appeared much against us.

It was equally as probable, too, he had gone eastward—perhaps to Tabira—a small village some seventy miles distant.

But which course should we take?

Consulting my friends, we at length resolved to retrace our steps to Alamilla, make inquiries of all we might meet on the way, and then, if we could gain no satisfactory information, to strike out for Tabira on a venture.

This matter settled, we at once turned back; but we had not proceeded far when we met a couple of Mexican hunters.

As I understood a smattering of Spanish, I at once addressed them, and, in course of conversation, gained the joyful tidings that a prisoner, such as I described, had been purchased by a Mexican, living not more than three miles distant, and that in all probability we should find him there now.

The path to his residence having been pointed out, I rewarded each of my informants with a gold coin; and then, driving the spurs into our horses, in less than half an hour we reined them in before a small hacienda, much to the terror of the inmates, who believed we had come to rob and murder them.

Assuring the proprietor, a rather prepossessing Mexican, that in case he gave us truthful answers no harm should be done him—but that, being partially informed already, the slightest prevarication would cost him his tongue and ears, if not his head—I proceeded to question him.

Thus forewarned, and much in fear of the execution of the threat, he gave straightforward replies, to the effect that more than a year ago Gonzalez had paid him a visit, and offered him an American at a small price, declaring that if he did not purchase he would knock the prisoner in the head without more ado, as he had cost him more time than he was worth; that at first, he (the proprietor of the hacienda) had refused to buy, having as many slaves as he cared about; but that something in the young man's appearance, and the appeal he made with his eye, had touched his feelings, and the bargain had at length been struck. He further stated that the prisoner had not been treated like the rest of his slaves, but with more respect, and had behaved himself like a

gentleman and won his confidence. A short time ago, he continued, a small tribe of Indians had called upon him, and offered a ransom for the prisoner, stating he was an old acquaintance; that he had accepted the offer, and the prisoner had departed with them, toward the north, in fine spirits.

This was the substance of the information I gathered here; but it was enough to intoxicate me with joy, and was received by the rest of the party with three hearty cheers, much to the astonishment of the old Mexican, who did not comprehend what was meant.

The prisoner was Huntly, there was no doubt of that, and the Great Medicine was the Indian tribe which had set him free.

The next thing was to go in quest of them. They had gone toward the north, and had had some time the start of us. It might be difficult to find them—but nothing, I fancied, in comparison with the task I had first undertaken of tracing out my friend. The Rovers agreed to accompany me as far as Santa Cruz, when, having seen me so far safe, they designed returning to Santa Fé.

> It is unnecessary for me to detail each day's journey.

Suffice, that in due time we arrived at Santa Cruz, where I parted from the Rovers, with many expressions of gratitude on my part, and heart-felt wishes for my success on theirs.

My party was thus reduced to six; and as two of the number preferred remaining here to going north immediately, I settled with them at once, still retaining Teddy, Pierre and Black George.

With these I again set forward rapidly, making inquiries of all I met.

For two or three days I could get no tidings of the Mysterious Tribe, and I began to have doubts of being on the right course.

Fortunately, before we had decided on changing our direction, we met a party of mountaineers, who informed us that a few weeks before they had seen a small tribe of friendly Indians, somewhere between the Spanish Peaks and Pueblo, among whom were a white man and a beautiful female half-breed; that they were moving

very leisurely toward the north; and that in all probability they were now encamped somewhere in the beautiful valley of the Arkansas.

Elated with the most extravagant anticipations of soon realizing our sanguine hopes, we again pressed forward for two or three days; and leaving the lofty Spanish Peaks to our right, tracing up the head waters of the Rio Mora, we struck off over the Green Mountains, and camped at last in the far-famed valley of the Arkansas, within full view of the eternally snow-crowned Pike's Peak.

CHAPTER XII.

THE JOYFUL MEETING WITH MY FRIEND.



OR two days after reaching the valley, our search proved fruitless, and the reader can better imagine my feelings than I can describe them.

My anxiety to see my long-lost friend was so great, that I could not rest at night, and barely devour enough food to support nature.

A consultation had resulted in shaping our course up the river; and on the third day we had the unbounded delight to meet with a couple of trappers, who informed us they had seen the Great Medicine Tribe only two days before, and that they were then encamped on a small creek, in a lovely valley, at the base of the southwestern mountain chain, surrounding what is known as the South Park, not more than sixty or seventy miles distant.

Never can I forget the feelings I experienced, nor the wild, prolonged, and deafening cheers which resounded at this announcement. Each of my companions seemed frantic with joy; and as for myself, I could have

clasped the informants, rough and half civilized as they were, to my beating heart.

Becoming at last a little more tranquil, we managed to impress upon ourselves a brief description of the route to be taken, and then we set forward with the wildness of madmen just loosened from an insane asylum.

On, on we dashed, over plain, heath and ridges, through thickets and streams, till the blowing and reeling of our animals warned us we must be more prudent, or their lives, at least, would be the penalty of our rashness.

Throughout that day nothing was thought of, nothing talked of, but our fortunate adventure, and the speedy prospect of gaining what we sought. Time, distance, everything, was everlooked; and when the sun went down, it appeared to us that the day had been by half the shortest of the season.

Very different was it with our horses, which were so exhausted from hard riding that serious fears were entertained lest we had ruined them. But a thorough rubbing down, and an hour or two of rest, revived them; and we at last had the satisfaction of seeing them crop the plentiful blade with their wonted gusto.

I slept none that night—in fact did not even lie down—but most of the time paced the earth to and fro before the fire-light, anxiously praying for the dawn, to resume our journey. My companions, however, slept soundly; for they had far less to think of than I, and moreover were sorely fatigued.

At the first blush of morning I roused them, and again mounting we set forward.

As both Pierre and Black George knew the country well, we lost no time by going out of the way, but took the nearest and safest course to the point described.

A ride of four hours brought us to the brow of a hill, looking down upon a fertile valley, where, joy inexpressible, we beheld a village of temporary lodges, and a few Indians, whom I instantly recognized as belonging to the anxiously-sought tribe.

“Hurray! we’ve got ’em—I’ll be dog-gone ef we

haint!" cried Black George. "Hurray for us beavers, sez I! and a quart on the feller as is last in!"

Uttering yell after yell, as wild as those of savages, we spurred down the hill with reckless velocity, each one striving to lead the rest and be the first to reach the goal of our present desires.

Had the tribe in question not been peaceably inclined, this proceeding would have been dangerous in the extreme, and a shower of rifle balls might have changed our joyous shouts to cries of pain and lamentation, or have put us beyond the pale of mortality.

Our rapid and tumultuous approach alarmed our friends; and men, women and children came running out of their huts, with fear depicted on their faces.

Among them were two figures that fixed my attention; and from that moment I saw nothing but Charles Huntly and Prairie Flower till my gallant beast stood panting in the center of the crowd.

"Charles!" I gasped, as I leaped from my steed, my brain fairly reeling with intense emotion; and, staggering up to where he stood, bewildered and confused, I threw my arms around his neck and swooned in his embrace.

When consciousness again returned, I found myself lying on a mat in a small cabin, hastily constructed of sticks and skins, and my friend standing by me, chafing my temples, dashing cold water in my face, and entreating me in the most piteous tones to arouse and speak to him. There were others around, but I heeded them not. I had neither ears, nor eyes, for any but my friend.

My first glance showed me that he was altered, but not more than I had expected to find him. His form was somewhat wasted, and his pale features displayed here and there a line of grief and suffering which I had never before seen.

"Frank," he cried, "for God's sake, look up, and speak to me!"

"Charles!" I gasped.

"Ha! I hear it again—that dearly loved voice!" and burying his head upon my breast he wept aloud.

In a few minutes I had completely recovered from my

swoon ; but it was a long time before either of us could master his emotion sufficient to hold conversation. We looked at each other, pressed each other by the hand, mingled our tears together, and *felt*, in this strange meeting, what no pen can describe, no language express. We had literally been dead to each other—we who had loved from childhood with that ardent love which cements two souls in one—and now we had come to life, as it were, to feel more intensely our friendship for the long separation. The excess of joy had nearly made us frantic, and taken away the power of speech.

At last we became more tranquil, when our friends, who had been present, but almost unnoticed, withdrew and left us to ourselves.

"And now, Frank," said Huntly, looking me earnestly in the face, his eyes still dimmed with tears, "tell me the news? Have you been home?"

"I have not."

"Ah! then I suppose you know nothing of our friends?"

"More than you imagine;" and I turned away my head, and sighed at the thought of the mournful intelligence I was about to communicate.

"Ha! what?" demanded Huntly, with tremulous anxiety. "Why do you avert your face? Has—has anything—happened?"

"Prepare yourself for the worst, dear Charles!" I replied, in a tremulous tone.

"For the worst?" he repeated. "Great Heaven! what has happened? Speak! quick! tell me! for suspense at such times is hard to be borne; and our imagination, running wild with conjecture, tortures us, it may be, beyond the reality."

"In this case I think not."

"In Heaven's name, speak!" he gasped, with the pallor of death.

"Promise me to be calm!"

"I will do my best."

His whole frame fairly trembled with excitement, and his forehead became damp with cold perspiration.

"Your father, dear Charles—" I began.

"Well? well?"

"Is—is—no more. The sod has twice been green above him."

"Oh, gracious God!" he exclaimed, throwing his hands aloft, with a look of agony I shall never forget; and then, covering his face, he groaned as one in the throes of death.

For some time I did not disturb him, thinking it best to let his first grief take its course in silence. At length I said :

"Come, my dear friend, rouse up and be a man! Do not give too much way to your sorrow! Remember, that in this world we all have to die—that we are doomed by the immutable laws of nature, and the decrees of an over-ruling God, to part from those we most dearly love! But it is only for a time. God is wise, and good, and does all things for the best; and it is only a short time, at the longest, ere we in turn shall depart to join them in a life beyond the reach of death. Cheer up, dear Charles! and look upon your father as one who has done with the cares and perplexities of life and made a happy change! I know how dearly you loved him—I know the trial to give him up is most painful—and from my very soul I sympathize with you in your affliction. But, my dear friend, we have other duties than to bewail the dead; for the living demand our attention; and you have friends still left you, equally near and dear, who stand in need of your most iron energies."

"Alas!" he groaned, his face still hid in his hands; "dead! dead! dead!—and I—his only son—far, far away!" He paused, and trembled violently for a few moments, and his breath came quick and hard. "But you are right, dear Frank!" he said at length, slowly raising his face, now sadly altered. "You are right, my friend! We know such things must, do, and will take place; and we should, to what extent we can, be philosophers all, and strive to be resigned to God's will. It is terrible, though—terrible—to lose a beloved parent, and not be at hand to hear his parting words, nor see him set forth on that journey from whence none ever return! But I—I—will strive to bear it—to at least *appear* calm."

And now, dear Frank—my—my—I fear to mention whom—lest I hear more painful, heart-rending tidings !”

“You mean your mother and sister?”

He grasped my arm nervously, partly averted his head, as if in dread of my answer, and said, almost inaudibly :

“I do.”

“Be not alarmed, dear Charles ! I left them well.”

“Left them well ?” he repeated, in surprise. “Did you not tell me you had not been home ?”

“True ! neither have I.”

“Then where did you see them ? and where are they now ?”

“I will answer your last question first. They are now in Oregon City.”

He gave me a deep, searching look, such as one would bestow upon a person whose sanity he had just begun to question.

“I do not wonder you look surprised,” I added : “but listen ere you doubt ;” and I proceeded to narrate, as briefly as I could, how I had met them near the South Pass of the Rocky Mountains, and under what singular circumstances ; how I had soon learned of their misfortunes, both in the loss of their dearest friend and their property—(which latter seemed to affect Charles less than I had expected)—how I had there met the Unknown, been warned of danger by Prairie Flower, and what had followed ; how I had subsequently accompanied the party to Oregon ; how I had proposed to Lilian, been accepted, and on what conditions ; and how I had at last been led to set off in search of my dearest friend, and what had happened on the journey.

In short, I gave him condensed particulars of all that had occurred since our parting, not forgetting my night search for him and the effect of his loss upon me at Los Angeles.

He listened attentively throughout, occasionally interrupting me with questions on points of more than usual interest, or where in my hasty narration I had failed to make the matter clear to him.

“Strange ! strange !” he said, when I had done ;

"very, very strange is all this ! It looks improbable—seems impossible—and yet I do not doubt your word. So, then, I am not worth a dollar?"

"Do not let that trouble you, Charles ! While I have money, neither you nor your friends shall want."

"I know that, Frank," he said, pressing my hand warmly ; "I know that. That, at present, is the least of my concern. And so you have seen the Unknown ? and she is called Eva Mortimer?" He mused a moment, and added : "Well, this is more singular than all ! Frank, we must set out for Oregon immediately."

"As soon as you please. And now tell me something of your own adventures?"

"Alas !" sighed he, "after the painful news you have communicated, I feel myself unable to enter into particulars. I will give you something in brief, for I know your curiosity is excited. In fact, I will give you the outline of my story, and anon will fill it up with detail."

"Proceed."

"At the time we separated to follow the wounded animal," he began, "I hurried around the foot of the mountain which you were ascending. In my haste I missed the path, and had spent some time in searching for it, when suddenly I found myself surrounded by half-a-dozen guerillas, who it seems were in waiting for the return of a larger party, momentarily expected, when all designed an attack upon some merchants coming in from Santa Fé. A single glance showed me resistance would be useless, and I surrendered myself a prisoner. They seized and began stripping me of everything valuable, when it occurred to me I could let you know my situation, and I accordingly shouted, as if calling to a party of my friends. The next moment I was seized and gagged ; when the cowards—fearful I suppose that this precaution had been taken too late, (for a cheer from you was heard in answer,) and that they might be attacked soon if they remained where they were—began to sneak away, taking me with them.

"When they had rendered themselves safe, by penetrating further into the mountains, they kept quiet till

night, and then sallied forth to the rendezvous, where they joined the others, in all some twenty persons.

"A consultation was now held, as to whether I should be put to death or taken along and sold into slavery. The latter was finally adopted, and Gonzalez, the chief, took me under his charge.

"Taking the great Spanish Trail, we set off toward Santa Fé, traveling mostly in the night and lying by through the day, often in ambush for some unfortunate wayfarers, who, in the encounters that sometimes ensued, generally lost both money and life.

"My dear Frank, I could describe events which have passed before my own eyes that would make your hair stand with horror; but as these are not necessary to my present story, I will omit them for the present.

"It was a strange fancy they had formed of selling me into slavery, and I could never rightly comprehend it. It could not have been for the amount I would bring—for that was small, in comparison to the trouble I must have cost them in guarding me from escape. No! I am inclined to think it the result of a whim—perhaps of the chief—who ever treated me with as much leniency as I could expect, or have dared to ask for. Still I was made to do menial services and used as a slave; and it might have been that my life was preserved for this; for save myself the party had no servant. Oh, how it made my blood boil at times, when I thought what I had been, and what I was! and how I groaned in secret, to think what must be your feelings, and the feelings of my friends, should the latter ever hear of my fate! But I still had hope; I was still alive; and I struggled to bear up manfully, and be resigned to my lot till Providence should favor my escape.

"The first hundred miles I was forced to proceed on foot—the robbers having no horses but what they rode themselves. Sometimes they traveled fast, obliging me to keep them company, and in consequence I suffered most severely. At last one of the band got killed in an affray, and his beast was assigned to me, which proved a great relief.

"One day the chief informed me that if I would take

the oath of his dictation, I might join the band and have my freedom—or rather, the freedom of a robber. I declined his offer, in language so decisive that he never after repeated the proposition, and I continued as before a slave. But I must avoid detail.

“At last we reached the Sierra de los Mimbres, where the band divided—the chief and a few followers taking me down to San Domingo, where I was offered for sale. Not meeting with success here, he continued down through the several villages, and, in short, to the very hacienda whither you and another (God bless you both!) traced me. Had he failed here in disposing of me to Pedro Lopez, I do believe he would have put an end to my existence.

“After much quibbling, the bargain was at last struck, and I became the property of Pedro Lopez.

“I shall now pass over the period of my slavery—the most unhappy one of my life. True, I was treated better than my companions, and, on the whole, suffered much less physically than mentally. But still I knew myself a slave—knew I was degraded; and the thought of my position—that thus I might be doomed to spend my days—nearly drove me mad. Sometimes evil thoughts would enter my head; and then I would half resolve to kill my master and take the consequences, or put an end to my own being. Then hope would revive, that something might turn up for my deliverance, and I would labor on, and strive to be resigned to bide my time.

“Thus a year rolled around, when one day Pedro Lopez came to me and inquired if I was contented with my situation! At first I thought he was mocking me, and I half-raised a garden-tool I had in my hand to dash out his brains. He must have guessed my intention from my looks; for he took a step back, and bade me be calm and give him a civil answer. I replied by inquiring if he would feel contented to be a slave in a foreign land? He shook his head, and said he would not—that he had felt for my situation from the first—and that that was the cause of my being treated better than my companions. He then told me that as I had ever behaved myself with propriety, and as he had been offered a fair

ransom by a small tribe of Indians, if I felt disposed to go with them he would give up all claim to me. A thought flashed upon me, that possibly this might be the tribe of Great Medicine, and I begged to see them. My request was granted, and the first glance showed me I was right in my conjectures; and, uttering a joyful cry, I rushed outside of the gate, to where they were assembled before the walls of the hacienda.

"Frank, it is impossible for me to describe my feelings then. Life, liberty, everything joyous, seemed bursting upon me at once, and my brain grew dizzy with the exhilarating, intoxicating thoughts. I hugged the first Indian I met; I danced, capered around, shouted, laughed, cried—in short, did everything extravagant to give my overpowering feelings vent. For an hour or two I was insane with joy, and my reasoning powers as bewildered as those of a lunatic.

"At last I began to grow calm; and then I went around to each of my old friends and shook them by the hand, thanked them with tearful eyes and trembling voice for my deliverance, and received their congratulations and caresses in return.

"But where was *Prairie Flower*? As yet I had not seen her. I made the inquiry, but could get no direct answer. Some shook their heads, others said she was not here, and others again that she was away. Finding none would answer me, I concluded they had a sufficient reason for their evasion and dropped the subject.

"When everything had been satisfactorily arranged, and I had become reasonably sobered down, we all set off toward the north. A horse had been provided for me, and all were mounted—the females, of whom there were several, mostly on mules.

"Some three miles from the hacienda we reached a heavy wood. Entering this about a mile, we made a halt by a spring. While watering the animals, I heard a distant rustling of the bushes and the tramp of more horses. Presently an airy figure, gaily attired, and mounted on a coal black Indian pony, burst through a dense copse near me, followed by five dusky maidens, and rode swiftly up to where I was standing by my steed.

" 'Prairie Flower!' I exclaimed; and the next moment she was on her feet and her hand clasped in mine.

"Oh, the emotions of that moment! Time seemed to have turned his wheel backward, and years of toil and grief and fatigue were forgotten. Passions, which had slumbered, or been half-obliterated by other events, were again awakened and brought forth from their secret recesses; and I saw her as I had seen her three years before, and felt all I had then felt, but in a two-fold sense.

"As for Prairie Flower, she was pale and exceedingly agitated. She grasped my hand nervously, gave one searching glance at my features, and burst into tears—but did not speak. Then she sprung away from me a few paces, dashed the tears from her eyes, and returning with a bound, asked me a dozen questions in a breath: 'How I had been? where I had been? if I were well? if I were glad to get my liberty?' and so on; and wound up by adding that she was rejoiced to see me, and hoped I should be more fortunate hereafter.

"Throughout our first brief interview, her manner was wild and her language almost incoherent—which, so different from anything I had seen, surprised and alarmed me. She would ask a question; and then, without waiting for an answer, ask another and another, or make some remark altogether irrelevant. At last, with a hope that I would now be happy, she informed me that she could see me no more that day; and before I had time to reply, she had darted away, sprung into her saddle and was off—followed by all the females of the tribe and some half a dozen of the other sex.

"This proceeding perplexed me not a little. I asked several the meaning of it; but they only shook their heads, and I was left to ponder it in secret.

"We pursued our way slowly toward the north; and I saw nothing of Prairie Flower, nor of those who had accompanied her, till about noon of the succeeding day, when she again joined us, with the rest of the tribe, among whom were some women and children I had not before seen, which led me to infer there had been two

camps, and this supposition was subsequently confirmed by Prairie Flower herself.

"My second meeting with Prairie Flower was very different from the first. She was calm, constrained, and I fancied cold ; though somehow I was led to think this rather forced than natural. She was polite, civil, and agreeable ; but all that passionate enthusiasm of the preceding day was gone. She did not speak with freedom, and her words seemed studied, and her sentences regulated by previous thought. In fact, she seemed to have relapsed into the same state as when we first were guests of herself and tribe. There was either something very mysterious about this, or else it sprung from one natural cause—and my vanity, it may be, led me to infer the latter. If she loved me, her actions were easily accounted for ; if she did not care for me, why had she taken so much pains, as her own lips revealed, to search me out ?

"In the course of the conversation which ensued, she narrated how she had met you—under what circumstances—and how, urged on by a sense of duty, she had at once set off with her tribe in the hope of learning something more of my fate. Fortune favored her ; for while on her way south, she met with an old mountaineer, who gave her tidings of a cheering nature. As her adventures have been so much like your own, Frank, I shall not enter into detail. Enough that she was successful in finding me, and that I am here.

"Day after day, as we traveled north, I had more or less interviews with Prairie Flower ; but though she ever treated me with respect and politeness, she always studied to avoid familiarity.

"At last we reached the present spot, where the tribe have encamped for a few weeks, or until the fishers and hunters shall have laid in a supply of provisions, when they intend proceeding further north. From Prairie Flower having seen you where she did, I inferred you had gone home, and every day have been intending to follow. But somehow, when the time has come to start, I have again put it off for another twenty-four hours ; and thus have been delaying, day after day, for what purpose I hardly know myself. I believe I have been held here by

some charm too powerful to break, and now that you have come I am glad of it."

"And that charm," said I, as my friend concluded with a sigh, "is Prairie Flower."

"It may be," he answered, musingly. "She is so strange—I do not know what to make of her. She is not an Indian—I feel certain of that; but as to who she is I am as unenlightened as ever. Do you really think she loves me, Frank?" he asked suddenly, rousing himself and fastening his eyes earnestly upon mine.

"How can I answer?" I said, evasively. "But I know of one that does, Charles."

"You mean the Unknown—or rather, Eva Mortimer?" he rejoined, musingly.

"I do. I have already delivered her message, sufficient to assure you of the fact; and she is certainly one worthy of being loved."

"It may be," he sighed, "and there *was* a time, Frank, when such intelligence would have made me happy. But now—(he paused, shook his head, and mused a moment)—now it is not so. When I first saw Eva, I had never seen Prairie Flower; and ere the germ of a first passion had been brought to maturity, the tree was transplanted to another soil, and the sun of another clime, although it did not change its nature, ripened it in another light. Or, to drop all metaphor," he added, "Eva was the first to arouse in me a latent passion, which doubtless a proper intercourse would have warmed to a mutual attachment; but ere this was consummated—ere I even knew who she was—without a hope of ever seeing her again—I departed, and have never beheld her since. She touched some secret chord in my breast, and I dwelt on her memory for a time, and loved her as an unapproachable ideal rather than as an approachable substance. I loved her, or fancied I did, rather that I had nothing else on which to place my affections, than for any substantial cause. In another I afterward found a resemblance which arrested my attention and changed the current of my thoughts. The singular manner in which we were thrown together; our daily interviews; my gratitude to her as the preserver of my life and

yours; her generosity; in short, the concentration in her of every noble quality and the absence of all others, gradually drew me to Prairie Flower; and ere I was aware of it myself, I found her presence necessary to my happiness. At last we parted, as you know how, and I strove to forget her; but, Frank, though I mentioned her not to you, I now tell you that I strove a long time in vain. By day and by night, in a greater or less degree, did she occupy my thoughts; and it was only when misfortunes fell upon me that her image gradually gave place to more trying thoughts. But our second meeting—an additional debt of gratitude for deliverance from slavery—has done the work; and I now feel I can love none but Prairie Flower."

"Then you are really in love, Charles?"

"I am; and I fear hopelessly so."

"I fear so too," sighed I. "But where is Prairie Flower? I must see and thank her from my heart."

As I spoke, the subject of our conversation glided into the rude lodge and stood before me.

CHAPTER XIII.

A STRANGE SURMISE.

"RAIRIE FLOWER! my dearest friend!" I exclaimed, springing to my feet and clasping her extended hands in both of mine: "Prairie Flower, this is a happy meeting—most happy!"

"I am very glad to see you, Mr. Leighton," she said, with something like a sigh; "very, very glad!" and she closed in a tremulous tone, while her dark eyes filled with tears.

Oh, how beautiful she looked, as we stood face to face, her hands clasped in mine! Never had she appeared

more lovely. Since our first meeting, time had ripened her to full maturity ; and though her sweet countenance was pale and sad, and though something like care and thought could be traced thereon, yet it was so mellowed, so blended with something lofty and noble, that it added a peculiar charm to her appearance which mere physical beauty could not sustain. It was a something that, while you admired, awakened your sympathy, and drew you to her, as toward one you felt it your duty and delight to soothe, cherish, and protect. As I gazed upon her a moment in silence, I became forcibly struck with the resemblance she bore to Eva Mortimer. She was a shade darker, perhaps ; but this might be owing to her life in the mountains, and constant exposure to the free, bracing air. There was the same mold of feature, and, in her now sad and thoughtful expression, a marked resemblance to that I had seen on the countenance of Eva as she bade me farewell. A sudden thought sent a hot flush over me, and involuntarily I took a step backward and scrutinized her again. Good heavens ! could it be possible ? No ! no ! it was too visionary. "And yet why too visionary ?" I said, half aloud. As strange things had happened. Eva had a sister—a twin sister—who was lost at an infantile age—who had been stolen away. There was no existing proof—or at least none to my knowledge—that that sister was dead : no one knew what had become of her. Here was a being of her own age apparently, and of a marked resemblance. Her history she would never touch upon—perhaps did not know. Might Prairie Flower not be that twin sister ? The thought, the suspicion, was wild and romantic—but what argument was there against it ? The ways of Providence are strange, but not in all cases past finding out.

"It must be so !" I ejaculated, completely absorbed with my speculations, and forgetful of everything around me.

I was aroused from my reverie by the voices of both my friend and Prairie Flower.

"What is the matter, Frank ?" cried Huntly, grasping my arm, shaking me, and gazing upon me with a look of

alarm. "Speak to me! speak! that I may know you have your reason!"

"Are you ill, sir?" joined in Prairie Flower, with a startled look. "I fear you are ill! Fatigue has overcome him," she added to Huntly. "Better get him to lie down on the mat, while I run for assistance."

"Stay! stay!" I exclaimed, as she turned to depart. "I am not ill. I was only—I beg your pardon—did I act strangely?"

"As I never saw you before," replied Huntly. "You stared wildly at Prairie Flower, and spoke incoherently. Tell me! are you in your senses!"

"Most certainly I am. I was only thinking of—of——"

"Of what, pray?"

"Prairie Flower, speak!" I exclaimed, addressing her, as she stood near the entrance, uncertain whether to depart or not: "Speak! what do you know of your history?"

"My history?" she repeated in surprise. "Have I not forbidden you——"

"Never mind now! I have important reasons for asking."

She colored to the eyes, and seemed greatly embarrassed.

"What reasons can you have," she rejoined, "for asking this, in this wild manner? You surprise and alarm me!"

"A resemblance," I replied, "a strong resemblance you bear to another. Fear not to tell me and my friend what you know; and we promise, if necessary, to keep your secret inviolate."

"Ay, do, Prairie Flower!" urged Huntly, vehemently, who now comprehended the whole matter. "Speak, dear Prairie Flower, without reserve! Speak, I pray you! for much depends upon your answer."

"Are you both mad?" she said, looking from one to the other, as if doubting our sanity.

"No! no!" I returned; "we are not mad, but in our sober senses. A weighty reason, which my friend did not at first, but now understands, and all important to you as well as ourselves and others, induces the inquiry.

Come, sweet Prairie Flower! will you not grant our request?"

She hung down her head, tapped the earth with her foot, and seemed confused and agitated. I approached and gently took her hand, and again in a soothing voice entreated her to tell us all she knew—reiterating my promise, that, if necessary, it should never pass to other ears.

"Say, sweet being! are you not of our race?—are you not a pale-face?"

For some time she did not reply, during which she seemed struggling to master her emotions. At length a half inaudible, "I am," escaped her lips.

"I thought so—I could almost have sworn it!" I returned, triumphantly. "And your parents, Prairie Flower?"

She burst into tears, and hid her face in her hands.

"Nay, sweet Prairie Flower, be calm!" I added. "Do not let this affect you so seriously. I do not seek to pry into your private affairs, only so far as I fancy the knowledge imparted may benefit yourself. Tell me—did you or do you know your parents?"

She shook her head and sobbed aloud.

"Believe me, gentle maiden, nothing is further from my design than to wound your feelings or recall painful associations. Do you know how you came among the Indians?"

"Something I know," she answered.

"Will you tell us what you know?"

"As you seem so anxious," she said, making an effort to dry her tears, "I will, on condition I gain the consent of Cha-cha-chee-kée-ho-bah."

"And what has he to do with it?"

"I have promised to reveal nothing without his consent. And now I think of it," she quickly added, "perhaps I have done wrong in saying what I have."

"Give yourself no uneasiness, Prairie Flower, for even he could attach no blame to what you have said. But how came you to promise him this?"

"He exacted it of me as my guardian."

"Indeed! Then he must know your history?"

‘He knows more of it than I do.’

‘Then I must see him at once.’ Pray, conduct me to him!’

‘Nay, sir,’ she answered, ‘it were useless. He would tell you nothing. He is old, and singular, and would look upon you as an intruder. I will see him, and see what can be done. He loves me, and I have more influence over him than any other of the tribe. If he refuses to tell me, no earthly power can open his lips, and the secret will go down to the grave with him. But now let me hear something of yourself, and how we all came to meet again in a manner so singular.’

‘One question more, Prairie Flower!’

‘Nay, no more. I will answer nothing further till I have consulted the Old-Man-of-the-Mountains.’

‘Be it so, then,’ I answered; and the conversation changed to matters connected with my present adventure.

We were still engaged in recalling past events, when an Indian maiden hurriedly entered the lodge, and said something in her own language to Prairie Flower.

‘Indeed!’ she exclaimed, starting and turning deadly pale. ‘Gentlemen, excuse me!’ and she hastened from the cot.

‘What can be the meaning of this?’ said Huntly.

‘Some startling news, I judge. Perhaps some one has been taken ill and sent for her.’

‘And so, Frank,’ returned Huntly the next moment, ‘you really think Prairie Flower and Eva sisters?’

‘There is so strong a resemblance, my friend, that, until I have proof to the contrary, I can hardly believe otherwise.’

‘Strange!’ he rejoined, musingly: ‘Strange! very strange! Yet since you have told me something of the history of the Mortimers, I must say the matter looks possible, not to say probable.’

‘At all events,’ I returned, ‘there is mystery somewhere, and I shall not rest till it be sifted to the bottom. I hope she may prevail upon the old man to allow her to tell what she knows, even if he add nothing himself.’

"And should it turn out as we suspect, Frank!" said Huntly, with great energy, grasping my arm as he spoke.

"Well?"

"You know I—that is——"

"I understand. You would have her the closest of kin—eh! Charles?"

"Say no more. I see you understand me. But then, I——"

"Well, say on."

"I—that is—you—perhaps she—she does not fancy me?"

"What! do you doubt?"

"Why, no—yes—I—I cannot say I doubt—but—but she is so strange, Frank! I would give the world to have her talk to me with the freedom she does to you."

"And if you really love her, Charles, you should give the world to have everything exactly the reverse; in other words, exactly as it is."

"What do you mean?"

"Why, simply, that she does not love me."

"Are you sure of this, Frank?" and Huntly fastened his eyes intently upon mine, as if to read my soul.

"As sure as that the sun shines at noon-day."

"And you think she—she——"

"Loves another."

Huntly turned deadly pale.

"Name him, Frank?" he gasped.

"Charles Huntly."

"Indeed!" he exclaimed, with a rapid change of countenance. "You think this?"

"I know it."

He took a step backward and looked at me hard for a moment—during which his color came and went rapidly, and his breathing became audible—and then he said, impressively:

"Frank, do not jest with me! To me this matter is of the gravest importance."

"I do not jest, Charles; I know your feelings, and you may rest assured I would be the last to jest with them."

"And you say she loves me?"

"I do."

He grasped my hand, the tears sprung into his eyes, and his voice trembled as he rejoined :

"Frank, I thank you for these words ! I am suffering under deep affliction—my life is clouded—but, if this be true, there is still sunshine—still an oasis in the desert—still something to look forward to."

"My words are true, my friend, if that is any consolation."

"And how have you discovered this so suddenly?"

"I have not. I have known it all along."

"Indeed ! you never told me so before."

"True, and for good reasons."

"What reasons, I pray?"

"I did not wish to encourage an attachment which may even yet prove hopeless."

"What mean you?"

"As I told you once before : Prairie Flower may love—nay, does love, mark that !—but may never marry—nay, may even reject the suit of him she idolizes."

"For what cause?"

"That she is already wedded to her tribe."

"But should she prove to be what we suspect?"

"That *may* alter the case with her ; and on the strength of that supposition, and that you have been so mysteriously brought together, and that I find your affections so firmly placed upon her, have I ventured to tell you what I have long known. But remember, Charles, I warn you not to be too sanguine in your expectations !"

"Well," answered my friend, "I will hope for the best. It is all very singular !" he added, relapsing into a musing mood.

"I suppose we had better not start for Oregon to-day?" said I, playfully.

"No, not to-day !" he replied ; "not to-day ! To-morrow, perhaps."

"Or peradventure the day following !"

"Ay, peradventure."

At this moment Teddy, Pierre and Black George

appeared at the door to pay their respects to my friend, and I quitted the lodge, bidding them pass in.

CHAPTER XIV.

ILLNESS AND DEATH OF GREAT MEDICINE.



S yet I had not exchanged a word with any of the tribe but Prairie Flower ; and as I left the cot, I turned toward a crowd, which was huddled together near the center of the temporary village, their eyes all fixed in a certain direction. I knew by this, and the abrupt departure of Prairie Flower, that something unusual had occurred ; and hastening forward, I soon reached them, and, to my surprise, found most of them in tears, and the others looking very solemn.

"What has happened, my friends?" inquired I.

On hearing my voice, those nearest to me turned round and extended their hands in silence. They then separated, so as to allow me a passage through ; and, as I moved along, I shook a hand of each on either side. They appeared glad to see me, but, at the same time, very sad, from some untoward circumstance, of which I felt anxious to be informed.

When I had concluded, I turned to an intelligent youth, and inquired the cause of each and all looking so serious.

He silently pointed his finger to the center lodge, and, after a solemn pause, uttered :

"Great Medicine."

"Sick?"

He nodded his head.

This, then, accounted for the agitation of Prairie Flower ; and after what had passed between us regarding her history, it may readily be inferred I felt no little

anxiety to ascertain to what extent the old man was indisposed, and whether his case was considered immediately dangerous. He was very old, I knew, and in all probability would not long survive. Should he die without revealing to Prairie Flower her history, all dependence of proof from her would be cut off, and it would doubtless be a very difficult, if not an impossible, endeavor, to identify her with the lost daughter of Madame Mortimer. On this account, as well as for old acquaintance sake, I was very anxious to enter the lodge—at the door of which were standing several females, weeping. I made a step forward for this purpose, when an Indian touched me on the shoulder and shook his head, as a sign that I must go no nearer.

"I have most important business with the sick man," I said. "Can I not be permitted to see him?"

He again shook his head,

"But this matter is urgent!"

"No one must see him," he answered, "but such as he desires to see."

"Then let me see Prairie Flower."

"She must not now be called. We wait her appearance."

"Will she soon be here?"

"I cannot say."

There was nothing to do, therefore, but to wait as patiently as I could. What troubled me the most, was the fear that the old man might die suddenly, and Prairie Flower, in her agitation, neglect to question him till too late.

For an hour I paced to and fro, in a very uneasy mood, revolving these things in my mind, when Prairie Flower made her appearance outside of the lodge, where she was instantly surrounded by those nearest in waiting, all eager for her intelligence.

Having spoken a few words with her, they all moved slowly away, with sorrowful looks, and Prairie Flower approached to where I was standing.

The Indians, though as anxious as myself to gain her tidings, moved not from their places, but waited in respectful silence for her to open the conversation.

I, however, not being bred in the same school with them, could not exercise the same patience ; and, taking a few steps forward, I said :

"Great Medicine is ill, Prairie Flower?"

"He is," she answered, in a tremulous voice.

"Very ill? dangerously ill?" I inquired.

"I fear he is."

The Indians behind me, on hearing this, uttered several deep groans, but said not a word.

"Can he survive, Prairie Flower?"

"I think not," she answered, mournfully shaking her head.

"Any particular disease?"

"Old age and debility. He is very old, and has not been well for some time. A few minutes before I was called, he was taken very ill. I fear his time to go is at hand. Friends," she added, addressing her tribe, "you are about to lose one you love and reverence. Let us commend his soul to the Great Spirit;" and thereupon each and all kneeled upon the earth in prayer.

When this was over, I turned to Prairie Flower again.

"Pardon me, fair being," I said, "at this solemn time, for intruding worldly thoughts upon your attention! But the Old-man-of-the-Mountains is about to depart, in all probability, to join his fathers and friends in another state. You think he holds the key to your history. If you have not already, would it not be well for you to bid him unlock the memories of the past, so far as relates to yourself?"

"True," she answered, with a start ; "I had forgotten that. I fear it is too late ; for already his voice falters, and he seems standing midway between time and eternity, and slowly receding toward the invisible land of spirits."

"Fly !" I urged : "fly, Prairie Flower ! and do your best, ere all is over !"

"I will," she said ; and at once hastened back to the lodge.

For another hour I paced to and fro impatiently, ever

and anon turning my eyes upon the hut where the old man was breathing his last.

At length Prairie Flower reappeared, and, with her, three Indian maidens, all weeping and seeming very much dejected.

On leaving the lodge, each went separate ways through the village, Prairie Flower approaching me direct.

"To prayer!" she said, addressing her friends, who still remained as she had left them.

All again kneeled as before. When they rose to their feet, I addressed her:

"What news, Prairie Flower?"

"He is sinking very fast," she answered, sadly.

"Did you gain any information?"

"No! I addressed him on the subject, but he only looked at me vaguely, and did not seem to comprehend what I said."

"Alas! I fear it is too late, Prairie Flower!"

"I fear so," she rejoined. "But he may revive a little; and if he do, I will question him again."

With this she returned to the lodge of the dying man, while I proceeded to join my friend, and inform him of what had occurred.

I found Huntly as I had left him, in company with our companions, all engaged in an animated conversation.

"Well," he said, as I entered, "what news, Frank? Something has happened, I know by your sober looks."

I proceeded to detail what had transpired, and the fears I entertained.

"This is unfortunate," he said, when I had done; "most unfortunate."

The sun was some half an hour above the hills, when Prairie Flower again joined us in haste. Pierre, Teddy and Black George had left some time before, so that no one was in the cot but myself and friend, and we were so deeply engaged in discussing the various matters which had transpired, as not to be aware of her close proximity till she spoke:

"Where is this lady," she asked, "whom I resemble?"

"I left her in Oregon City," I replied.

"That is far away," she rejoined, musingly.

"But what success, Prairie Flower?"

"Better than I expected."

"Indeed! You give us joy."

"As I observed he might do, when I quitted you," she answered, "the old man again revived, when I immediately put the question as to what he knew of my history. He seemed much surprised, and inquired my reasons for asking. I hurriedly informed him of your conjectures. He listened attentively, and seemed ill at ease. He had promised, he said in reply, never to divulge, during his natural life, who I was, nor anything connected with my earliest years."

"Ha! then he knows your history himself?"

"Nay, do not interrupt me."

"I crave your pardon! Go on."

"Yes," continued Prairie Flower, "he said he knew much concerning me, but did not know all; that something had whispered him this information might be valuable to me at some future time; and that he had recorded it on a roll of parchment, which he had purchased of a trader for the purpose. This parchment, he said, was concealed under a stone, in a certain place, which none but such as to whom he might reveal the secret would ever be able to find. He further said, that if in truth I had a sister and mother living, I had better perhaps seek them out; and, should they recognize and claim me, I could then do as I should think proper, either cling to them or my tribe; that although I had been reared for the most part among Indians, and had adopted their habits and customs, still I was not of their race, not of their blood, and he could therefore see nothing unnatural or improper in my desiring to form acquaintance with my own kin. But, he added, lest I should meet with disappointment—in my kin, or those I supposed to be such, not claiming me on what I and they might know—he thought it better that I should remain ignorant of myself until I had seen them face to face;

when, should all turn out as I desired, it would be time enough to produce proof ; and that if I would promise to go in quest of them before perusing, or allowing another to peruse, the parchment in question, he would make its locality known."

"What a singular request !" said I.

"True," replied Prairie Flower ; "but, as I have said before, Great Medicine is a very singular being, and an enigma to all."

"And did you agree to his proposition ?"

"I did, though somewhat reluctantly. But I knew, if I did not, that the secret would die with him, and of this I could not bear to think."

"And so he told you all ?"

"He did."

"And where is the parchment concealed ?"

"Nay," she answered, shaking her head, "I do not know as I am at liberty to tell."

"I beg your pardon, Prairie Flower ! I certainly had no right to question. But you will accompany us to Oregon City ?"

"That is what I came to speak about," she replied, timidly. "You really think your conjectures are right ?"

"We do," answered Huntly. "Everything tends to convince us so. At first, what was only a vague suspicion with us, has since grown almost to a certainty. Come, go with us, sweet Prairie Flower ! Say you will go, and I shall be happy."

Prairie Flower changed color as Huntly spoke, and turned aside her head.

"And you will allow me a few companions ?" she timidly inquired.

"As many as you please," returned Huntly, "so you will consent to go."

"But when do you start ?"

"We will wait your time."

"My duty," she said, solemnly, "is henceforth by the side of Cha-cha-chee-kee-ho-bah, till he take his departure to the land of eternal rest—then to follow his remains to the grave—which done, I shall soon be ready to

join you. Adieu, for the present! I must return to him now."

Saying which, she quitted the lodge.

"At last!" said Huntly, turning to me: "At last, Frank, I have hope! Let us forth and take the evening air—for strange thoughts are crowding my breast."

Arm in arm we strolled through the little village, where the solemn faces of all we met bespoke the gloom of mourning for one universally beloved, and took our way down to the little streamlet, which, all unconscious of mortal change, ran murmuring on as it had done perchance for ages. All nature reposed in her most charming beauty of quietude. The sun was just beginning to sink behind the lofty mountains to the westward, and the last flood-light of day made golden the tiny waves of the water, and began to hasten the long shadows, precursors of diurnal night, and that night of death which knows no waking. The very air seemed solemn, it was so still. Scarce a breath moved, and the leaflets hung down their heads as if in sorrow. The feathered warblers, which had made music all day, were winding up their tunes with what seemed a melancholy cadence. A few night-watchers had just begun to give each other calls in timid tones, as if half afraid their voices were trespassing upon a scene too sacred. It was just calm enough, and mild enough, and lovely enough, and solemn enough, to awaken meditative thought; that thought in which all the unutterable poetry of our nature becomes infused; when the outward sense bids the inner tongue speak to us in language which the enraptured soul only comprehends; when we feel a melancholy happiness, and a desire to steal away from everything living, and in solitude commune with ourselves and our God; when the natural voice jars discordantly with the finer and more elevated tones of our being, proceeding from the spirit-harp, touched by the unseen hand of the All-pervading Deity; when, in short, we feel drawn by an unexplainable sympathy to a lonely meditation on things high and holy, beyond the matter-of-fact events of every-day experience.

Did you never feel thus, reader? Did you never steal

away from your daily cares, your business, your friends—from everything common and evanescent—to hold a quiet communion with your nobler thoughts?—and then trace those thoughts, as it were, to their primeval source—the eternal fount of the Great All-Good? And are not such sweet thoughts, and sweet moments of happy rest, in a life more or less filled with turmoil and pain? For myself, I answer yes; for I look upon them as fore-tastings of a state of blissful and eternal beatitude, when the changing circumstances of this life shall trouble us no more forever.

Thus I felt, and thus my friend, on the present occasion. Deep thought with both was too busy for words, and we gained the rivulet in silence. Some fifty yards above us was a large, flat rock, overhanging the gurgling waters. Toward this Huntly silently pointed; and obeying the gesture, I accompanied him thither. Seated at length upon it, our eyes simultaneously became fixed upon the rapid current laving its base, and our ears drank in its music, while the sunlight gradually departed from the stream, the deepening shadows of night stretched over us, growing more and more somber, and the stars here and there began to peep out in the heavens, and shine brighter and more bright, till the firmament above appeared blazoned with thousands on thousands of shining worlds, the armorial bearings of the Great Omnipotent. Still we sat in silence—now soaring in thought to another existence—now dwelling upon the wonders of nature as a complicated whole, or equally complicated, inexplicable part—and anon reviewing the past, touching upon the present, and leaping forward in imagination to the future—that future, to the young, of golden hopes and bright anticipations, destined for the most part never to be realized. Thus we mutely sat, for an hour or more, when Huntly broke the silence.

“Frank,” he said, “what a charm, what a solemn charm, there seems in everything to-night! I have been musing, as it were, upon everything. I have been back to my boyhood days, when I was wild, giddy, reckless, and frolicsome; when I had no thought beyond the sport of the hour, and no ambition but to make a jest of my

fellow beings. I have traced up our youthful sports (for you and I were almost one, you know,) to that sudden resolve which parted me for the last time from my beloved father."

Here his voice faltered to a pause, and for some moments he remained silent, with his face bowed upon his hands. Then raising his head, he dashed away a few tears, and resumed :

"I have recalled event after event to the present time ; and I find, in my reckless career, that I have much, too much, to regret. But I believe in an overruling, mysterious Power, and that there has been a purpose in all beyond my own simple inclinations. Adversity, I feel, has been for the best, by working in me a great change. Yes, Frank, I am a changed being. From boyhood I have passed to manhood, and from the idle follies of youth, to the wiser and more sober thoughts of maturer age. Once I was all for adventure and change—but now the case is different. I have seen enough, and am satisfied. Let me once more be comfortably situated, with a home and friends, means to gain an honest living, and, Frank, one, one sweet being, to cheer me with her smiles over the otherwise toilsome path of life, and I shall rest content."

"A great change this, in Charles Huntly, most certainly," I said ; "a great change indeed ! But perhaps no more than in myself ; for I, too, am tired of adventure, and ardently long for those very joys, (joys now, Charles, though once it was not so,) of which you speak."

"Hark !" exclaimed my friend at this moment. "What sound is that ?"

A long, loud, mournful wail came borne upon the air.

"Alas !" said I ; "it speaks of a soul departed !"

"Let us return," said Huntly, with a sigh ; and forthwith we set out for the village.

On our way thither, we several times heard the same melancholy sound ; and as we entered the precincts of the little settlement, we beheld somber figures moving to and fro, bearing lighted torches. As we drew near the

center lodge, I discovered Prairie Flower, in company with several of her own sex, moaning with grief.

She espied us as we came up, and, separating from her companions, approached and extended a hand to each.

"Alas, my friends," she sighed, "I need your sympathy! He who has been to me a guardian, a father, is now no more."

Her voice faltered as she spoke, and, withdrawing her hands from ours, she covered her eyes and wept aloud.

CHAPTER XV.

THE LEGACY OF PRAIRIE FLOWER.



THE second day from his death, was the one set apart for the burial of the Old-Man-of-the-Mountains. Each of my party, and every one of the tribe, was present, and the funeral rite was conducted in the solemn manner described in a former chapter. As it had been the province of the deceased to enact a peculiar part on all similar occasions, and as this constituted one of their forms of worship, it became necessary for the tribe to select one of their number to fill his place. The one chosen for the office, which he was to hold till death, was an old, white-haired Indian, of benevolent aspect, who at once entered upon his duties, and thenceforth took the title of "Great Medicine."

A grave was dug in the valley by the little stream; and here the deceased was buried, with all the mournful honors befitting his station. Great were the lamentations, and many the tears shed, as his body was lowered to his last, long, narrow home—the house appointed for all living! When his remains had been covered from

the sight of all, and the "Last Dirge" had been chanted, several Indian maidens brought and strewed flowers over the damp earth; and then repeating, "Sleep in peace, beloved!" the whole tribe took a solemn leave of the spot, and slowly and sadly retraced their steps to the village.

An hour or two later, Prairie Flower sought me out and said:

"I suppose, my friend, you are anxious to be on your way?"

"At your earliest convenience," I replied.

"I do not wish to detain you," she rejoined; "but if you can delay another day, it will greatly oblige me, as I have much to attend to ere I depart."

"A day, either way, will make but little difference," said I; "and, moreover, we could not expect you to leave sooner, after what has occurred."

"Thank you," she replied. "I will hasten all my arrangements, and at sunrise to-morrow will be yours to command;" and she left me to begin her preparations.

In the course of the day, Prairie Flower informed the tribe of what had transpired relative to herself, and also of her present design. The younger members, who had always looked upon her as one of themselves, were much surprised, and all were very sad at the thought of parting with one so dear to them. They could not but admit, under the circumstances, it was her duty to go; but they made her promise, in case events should turn up inducing her to withdraw from them altogether, that she would at least pay them one more visit ere saying the final farewell. She then made choice of three young men and two maidens to be her companions, and selected five noble steeds for them to ride, reserving the little pony for herself.

At daylight on the following morning the whole village was astir; and having broken our fast, the horses were caught and saddled, and, ere the sun was half an hour above the hills, all were in readiness to start.

The parting scene between Prairie Flower and her friends was very affecting. She embraced all of her own sex—kissed the children over and over again—shook the

young men and aged by the hand—and, amid tears at losing her, and earnest prayers for her safety and happiness, sprung upon her pony and dashed away, too much affected to witness the separation between those who remained and those selected to accompany her. The latter now took leave, one by one; and though much feeling was displayed on both sides, yet it was very different from the farewell of Prairie Flower.

“My friends,” said Huntly, when it came our turn to depart, “for your kindness to me I feel very, very grateful—but at present, the only return in my power to make is thanks. Should I ever have an opportunity to do more, you shall find that your labors in my behalf have not been unworthily bestowed. Farewell! If we meet not again on earth, I trust we may in a better state.”

Each of our party next proceeded to shake hands with each of the tribe; and as soon as this was over, we sprung upon our horses, and, dashing away, soon joined those in advance.

I must now pass rapidly over our journey, as but little occurred on the way of interest to the general reader.

Our provisions were supplied by our trusty rifles—we sometimes killing a bear, a deer, and once or twice a buffalo.

Entering the beautiful South Park, a kind of second Eden, we pushed forward, and on the second day reached the head waters of the South Fork of Platte, down which stream we continued to St. Vrain's Fort, where we all arrived without accident.

Here I took leave of Pierre and Black George, paying them liberally for their assistance, and pursued our journey toward the Black Hills, to the very spot where I had first been introduced to the Mysterious Tribe, and where, as I learned from Prairie Flower, they intended making their winter quarters.

On our way thither, Prairie Flower threw off much of that reserve which she had hitherto exercised toward Huntly; and not unfrequently they rode on together for miles, engaged in earnest conversation. The effect of

this upon my friend was very gratifying to me ; it seemed to divert his thoughts from more painful subjects ; and I saw with pleasure that his pale, careworn features gradually resumed their wonted appearance, and his eye, especially, its former luster. Still he was sad at times—very sad—and then I knew his thoughts were dwelling upon the loss of his father, and the afflictions of his mother and sister. He was naturally but little given to despondency ; and when in company with myself or another, ever strove to be cheerful, that he might not cause us the pain of sympathy.

Sometimes I held long, private conversations with Prairie Flower ; and then she would ask me over and over again about her supposed sister and mother—whether I thought they would be glad to own her—and more than once made me recount what little I knew of their history. This was a theme of which she seemed never to tire, and oftentimes would be affected to tears. Then she would tell me how she had mused over herself, and wondered who she was—whether she had a mother living—and if so, whether that mother ever thought of her. Sometimes she had fancied herself ignobly born—that she had been cast off in infancy—and then she had gone away by herself and wept bitter tears, and had prayed ardently that she might be resigned to her fate. She loved the Indians—among whom, at an early age, her lot had been cast—to her they were as brothers and sisters ; but still the knowledge that she was not of their race—a secret yearning for the fond look and tender tone of a mother—had troubled her sorely ; and nothing but the consolation of religion, and the hope of at last meeting her relatives in a better world, had supported her through her lonely trials.

Until I heard this from the lips of Prairie Flower, I had no idea that such was the case, and had believed her contented and happy in the position where Providence had placed her, as had all who knew her. But they, as well as I, had overlooked, that where mystery clouds the birth of an individual, the thought of this to a sensitive, intelligent mind—his or her speculations upon it—the want of, the yearning for, more knowledge—must at

times render such, no matter what the outward seeming, very unhappy. It was this very thing, perhaps, which had made Prairie Flower so distant toward my friend, whom she loved, as I knew, with a passion pure and holy. She had thought herself unfit to be his companion, and had nobly struggled to undo what nature had done; and oh! what a hopeless and painful struggle it had been!—what an iron resolution it had required to carry it out!—and how many sleepless nights and miserable days it must have cost her!

At last we reached the village, to which, some three years before, I had been borne from the field of battle in an unconscious state. What singular associations the sight of it revived! and how mournful its present aspect! It was deserted, and silent; and though most of its rude tenements were still standing, yet their half dilapidated appearance, and the general air of long desertion and decay everywhere visible, brought to mind Goldsmith's unrivaled and beautiful poem of the "Deserted Village." We rode through the little town in silence, noting each thing as we passed—and when we had got beyond it, Prairie Flower turned, gazed back, sighed deeply, wiped a few tears from her eyes, and then urged her little pony forward at a rapid pace.

A ride of half a mile brought us to a huge old tree, with a hollow trunk, when Prairie Flower came to a halt and said:

"My friends, this is the spot designated by Great Medicine as the one where I should find a treasure to me more valuable than a mine of gold. Beneath that stone lies all or nothing. Oh! how I tremble, lest it prove the latter! Heaven grant I find what I seek!"

"Amen to that!" responded I; and the whole party dismounted.

Leading the way, Prairie Flower passed the tree a few feet, and rested her delicate foot upon a stone of singular appearance.

"Here!" she almost gasped, while her features grew deadly pale with excitement, and her frame shook nervously: "Here!" and she pointed down with her finger, but could say no more.

Forming a circle around the stone, we all gazed upon it a moment in silence, and then addressing Huntly :

"Come, my friend," I said, "let us raise it."

Stooping down, we applied all our strength to it in vain.

"It seems bedded in the earth by nature," said Huntly.

"Oh, no! say not that!" cried Prairie Flower, in alarm. "Say not that, I beg of you! This is the spot described to me by the Old-Man-of-the-Mountains. I have thought of it by day—dreamed of it by night. I here have rested hopes of which you little think. Hopes, whose realization may render me the most happy, as disappointment would the most miserable, being on earth. If I have made a mistake, it is a fatal one. A mistake —But no! no! it must not, must not, be! Help, here, some of you!" she added, addressing the others. "Be quick! and do not keep me in this torturing suspense!"

She spoke hurriedly, almost frantically, and her manner was very wild. As she concluded, she clasped her hands and gazed down upon the rock with a look I shall never forget. It was the agonized concentration of hope and fear: as if, in truth, she feared herself about to lose the only friend she had on earth.

Instantly Teddy and one of the Indians laid hold with us, and our united efforts moved the stone from its foundation. All pressed forward, and eagerly gazed into the aperture. Nothing was there, apparently, but smooth, solid earth.

For a moment Prairie Flower stood stupefied with amazement and despair. Then, burying her face in her hands, she sunk down upon the earth, without uttering a syllable.

"Do not despair!" cried I; and, bending down, I felt the earth with my hand.

It was soft, as if it had once been removed. I hastily dug down a few inches, and my hand touched a solid substance. Brushing away the dirt rapidly, I discovered, to my unspeakable delight, a small, wooden box.

"It is here!" shouted I; "it is here!" and the next

moment I had torn it from the ground and stood triumphantly holding it aloft.

My words roused Prairie Flower, who started to her feet with a scream, caught the box from my hand, pressed it eagerly to her lips and heart, and then paced to and fro in an indescribable delirium of delight. At length she became more calm; and turning to the rest of us, who stood looking on in silence, she said, in one of her sweetest tones:

"My friends, you must excuse me!—but oh! you know not, cannot know, my feelings for the last five minutes!"

"We can at least imagine them," returned I; "and certainly there is no apology needed. We are only too happy in discovering the treasure."

"Ay, treasure indeed!" she exclaimed, holding the box from her, and gazing upon it with a singular expression. "Ha!" she added: "here is something written on the outside;" and, examining it a moment, she added: "It is in the language of the Mysterious Tribe, and, translated, reads, '*Seek lower!*'"

"That implies something still below," observed Huntly; and stooping down, he thrust his hand into the loose earth, and presently drew forth a lump of pure gold, weighing some three or four pounds.

Great was our astonishment on beholding this; but it was increased the next moment by my friend bringing up two more of nearly equal size and value. These lumps had no particular shape, and had the appearance of having been melted and poured upon a rough substance.

"This is strange!" remarked Prairie Flower, as we all stood examining them; "and where could Great Medicine have procured them? There is no gold in these mountains that I am aware of. And, by-the-way, this reminds me that Great Medicine was always well supplied with gold, though where it came from was always a mystery to the rest of the tribe. And see!" she added, giving one of the pieces a close scrutiny: "See! here is my Indian name, *Leni Leoti*, scratched upon it with some sharp instrument."

"And on this," said Huntly, holding up another.

"And on this," repeated I, turning over the third.

"They were intended for you, Prairie Flower," observed Huntly, addressing her; "and together form no mean gift."

"He was always kind to me, and I loved him," rejoined Prairie Flower, artlessly, her eyes filling with tears.

"But where could so much gold, in this rough state, have been obtained?" asked Huntly, turning to me.

A sudden thought flashed through my mind, and I turned to Prairie Flower.

"Was Great Medicine ever much abroad?"

"Never far from the tribe, since I first knew him," was her answer.

"But the tribe has been roving?"

"Yes, we have seldom spent a year at a time in one place."

"Were you ever in California?"

"One season we quartered on a beautiful oasis in the Great Desert, as we termed it."

"Ha! then there is some grounds for my conjecture;" and taking Huntly aside, I recalled to his mind the shiny sand we had there gathered, and added: "I think we were right in our surmises of its being gold!"

"True," he answered, with a start; "I remember now, though I had completely forgotten the circumstance."

"And so had I, till this revived it."

"Have you any of that sand with you, Frank?"

"I have not. Our subsequent perils drove the matter from my mind; and if any remained on my person when we arrived at Sutter's, it was thrown away with the tattered garments that contained it."

"Well, let it go!" rejoined Huntly, musingly; "let it go! There is gold there, without doubt—and some day it will doubtless be the means of great speculation."

"This being the case, my friend, suppose we make another tour, and ascertain for a certainty? If true, our fortune is made."

Huntly looked at me seriously for a moment, with a

very peculiar expression of countenance, and then re-joined, in a decisive tone :

"No, Frank ! not even a mine of gold would tempt me to encounter the perils of such a journey again. Suppose I were to prove successful and make a fortune—what then ? What is wealth, after all, that man should make himself a slave ? 'Tis here—'tis there—'tis gone. Look at my lamented father, for example ! One day he could count his thousands—the next he was a beggar—and the grave soon followed to cover a broken heart. Fortune is not happiness—therefore I'll pay no court to the truant jade. Let those have wealth who crave it ; let them worship the golden Mammon ; for myself, let me be happy with little, and I ask no more. But, come ! I see Prairie Flower and the rest are waiting for us, and we must be on the move."

Joining the others, we made further search ; but finding nothing new, we all mounted our horses and set forward—Prairie Flower in better spirits than I had ever seen her. Though in possession of the box, supposed to contain all she desired, yet she absolutely refused to open it, lest she might be tempted to an examination of its contents, and thus break her promise to the dying old man.

Summer had already passed, and the mortal stroke of old Autumn was even now beginning to be felt on the mountains. The trees, which had waved their green leaves as an accompaniment to the music of the forest choir, were already changing color, as if in dread of the steady, onward strides of their annual, but ever-conquering foe. The first process of decay had begun—but so beautifully begun, that one, as he gazed upon it, though it awakened a solemn, almost melancholy train of thought, could hardly wish it otherwise. As we ascended the mountains, higher and more high, the scene below us became enchanting in its variety. Far, far away, for miles upon miles, the eye roved over hill and plain ; while the soul, as it were, drank in the very essence of nature's beauty. The atmosphere was cool and clear, and the sun brilliant, but not warm. In every direction there was something new for the eye to rest upon—something

new for the mind to ponder. I beheld distant mountains rising to the very skies—isolated, glistening and cold in their lonely grandeur—as one who has ventured to the topmost round of Ambition's ladder, and scorns in his elevation all meaner objects grovelling in the dust below. I beheld lovely valleys, as yet untouched by the destroyer, still bright in their summer garments, through which purred silvery streams—the former doomed ere long to put on the withered shreds of mourning, and the latter to cease their murmurs in the icy fetters of the advancing Winter-King. In short, I beheld hills, and dales, and forests, and rolling prairies, and rivers, and rivulets, all spread before me in picturesque succession, and all more or less variegated with the many-hued mantle of autumn. The scene was enchanting; and as Prairie Flower, who with my friend had also been silently surveying it, observed, with a sigh :

“Most melancholy beautiful.” ✓

But lovely as was the view, I had but little time for contemplation; for the long journey before us, and the lateness of the season, required us to hasten forward, that we might pass the mountains before the snowstorms and ice of winter should completely bar our way. We had yet some thirteen hundred miles to travel, and, with everything favorable, could not hope to reach our destination in less than five or six weeks. Fortunately our animals were in good order, lightly laden, with no troublesome vehicles creaking and rumbling after, to delay us with bad roads and breaking accidents.

Leaving Laramie Peak to our right, we struck across the Laramie Plains to the Sweet Water Mountains, and thence descended to the great Oregon trail, crossing the Rocky Mountains at the well-known South Pass. For the rest of the distance, our road was to some extent a traveled one, and our progress, with some little delays, very rapid. As nothing of unusual interest occurred on the route, I shall pass it over without a record.

On the evening of the first day of November, 1843, we came in sight of the lights of Oregon City, which we hailed with three deafening cheers.

CHAPTER XVI.

A JOYFUL REUNION.



O describe my feelings and those of Huntly when we halted within view of the dwellings containing those around the very tendrils of whose hearts our own were entwined, on whose happiness or misery our own were depending, would be impossible, and therefore I shall not attempt it. The day's journey had been very severe—for we had all ridden hard, in order if possible to reach the village before nightfall. In this we had not succeeded; but knowing we were near, we still pressed forward after night had set in, and, by nine o'clock in the evening, had come in sight of the glimmering lights of the little town.

We now held a short consultation, which resulted in Huntly, Teddy and myself resolving to go forward, while Prairie Flower and her companions were to encamp and remain where they were through the night. Our object in this was to see our friends alone, and prepare them to receive our fair benefactress, whom we intended to introduce as an Indian maiden, and then leave matters to take their own course.

Having at length arranged everything to our satisfaction, we rode forward, and, in less than half an hour, drew rein near the humble cottage of Mrs. Huntly.

"And is it here," said Charles, as he gazed with a sigh upon the rude edifice, "that I again meet my dear mother and sister? Alas, Frank, there is a change indeed in our fortune! and now I feel it."

"Repine not," returned I; "but rather thank God that you are safe, and look forward to better days!"

"I will not repine," he said. "But, Frank, there is such an air of poverty here that I could not avoid giving vent to my thoughts."

As we spoke we dismounted, and, giving our horses

in charge of Teddy—with orders to take good care of them, and seek another place of rest for himself—we approached the door with trembling steps, and with conflicting feelings of hope and fear. What if something had happened, and we should find a stranger in place of those we sought?

The house was tightly closed, but not unoccupied, as we could see by the light which here and there shone through a crevice.

"Go forward!" whispered Huntly; and I advanced and rapped timidly on the rough door.

To this there came no answer; and I repeated it, but harder and louder.

"Who is there?" said a soft voice from within.

Gracious heavens! how its tones thrilled me! I knew it! I would have known it among a million! It was the voice of my own beloved Lilian!

"A friend," answered I, as with one hand I grasped the arm of Charles, who was now trembling with agitation.

"Pardon me!" answered Lilian; "but will you give me your name? as it is already somewhat late, and there is no one within but mother and myself."

"And do you not know me, Lilian?"

"That voice!" I heard her exclaim; "that voice!" and the next moment there was an agitated rattling at the door, which instantly swung open, and revealed the idol of my thoughts standing before me, pale and trembling.

"Lilian!" I exclaimed; "thank God we meet again!" and in an instant she was folded in my embrace and weeping with joy.

"Oh!" she ejaculated, looking up affectionately into my face: "oh, Francis, this is more than I have prayed for—more than I expected! I did not look for you this season. But, ha!" she exclaimed, as the shadow of her brother, who had stolen in behind her unperceived, fell upon her vision; "we are not alone."

She turned suddenly round, and her eyes met the tearful ones of Charles, as, with outstretched arms, he

stood ready to receive her, too much affected to utter a syllable.

For a brief moment she remained speechless and motionless, as if fearing to believe her senses ; and then gasping, "My brother !" she staggered forward and sunk half fainting upon his breast.

At this moment Mrs. Huntly, who had been on the point of retiring, but had been deterred by the sound of voices, entered the room from an adjoining apartment.

"Whom have we here?" she said, as she advanced toward us, looking from one to the other inquiringly, but unable from the position of the light to see our features. "Francis !" she exclaimed, joyfully, as I took a step forward ; "Francis, my son, do I indeed behold you again !" and, ere the words were concluded, I found myself closed in a motherly embrace. "This is indeed a happy surprise !" she added warmly.

"But there," returned I, pointing to Charles, who, still straining Lilian to his breast, was now gazing upon his mother with that singular expression of intense rapture, which the imprisoned soul, struggling as it were for release, and choking all utterance, stamps upon every feature : "there," said I, "a more happy surprise awaits you ;" and springing forward, I took the half unconscious form of Lilian from the arms of my friend.

For a moment mother and son stood face to face, gazing upon each other, completely overpowered by their feelings.

"Mother !" at length burst from the lips of Charles.

"My son !"

And staggering forward, they fell upon each other's neck, and gave their overcharged souls vent in tears.

For some time no one spoke ; and then raising her tearful eyes to Heaven, and in a voice of deep solemnity, Mrs. Huntly ejaculated :

"Almighty God ! I thank Thee for this moment of unclouded happiness !—for restoring the wanderer safe to the only parent he has on earth !"

"Ay, the only parent !" added Charles, with a fresh burst of emotion ; "the only one, dear mother ! My father—alas ! my father !"

He paused, overcome by his feelings.

But I will not prolong the affecting scene. Suffice, that for more than an hour very little was said, except in the way of thanks to the Supreme Ruler for bringing us all safely together once more. And well might we be thankful to that watchful Providence, which had slumbered not in our hours of grief and danger, but had brought us all out, as it were, from the very "Valley of the Shadow of Death."

The first transports of joy over, we gradually grew calm; and having formed a small circle before the cheerful fire:

"Now," said Mrs. Huntly, "let me hear something of my friends in Boston."

"Alas;" sighed I, my mind reverting at once to my own parents, "I can give you no news from that quarter."

"And have you not been home?" she asked in surprise.

I shook my head.

"Then you met Charles on the way, and he perhaps can tell me?" and she turned to him inquiringly.

"Nay, mother," he answered sadly, "I have not seen the land of my nativity since I there parted from you."

"Why, what means this?" she asked, turning to me.

"Pardon me," I said, in some embarrassment, "if I once deceived you both!—but I did it for the best."

"Deceived us!" exclaimed both Lilian and her mother in a breath. "Pray explain yourself, Francis!" added the latter.

"You remember I told you that when I parted from Charles he was going eastward?"

"Well? well?"

"But I did not add that it was only intended as a parting of a few minutes, and that when I met you on the mountains I believed him lost to us all forever."

"Lost?" cried Mrs. Huntly.

"Lost?" echoed Lilian.

"Lost!" rejoined I. "Ay, lost indeed—for I believed him dead."

"Oh, speak, Francis!" exclaimed Mrs. Huntly, greatly agitated, and looking from me to Charles, and

from Charles to me : "speak, Francis, and tell us what you mean !"

"Charles," I returned in a trembling voice, "was taken prisoner by a band of guerrillas ; but I—I—believed him dead—for no trace of him could be found."

"A prisoner? You, Charles, my son, a prisoner?" cried his mother ; and again throwing herself upon his neck, she burst into tears ; while Lilian, gliding up to his side, took his hand in silence, and gazed mournfully upon him with swimming eyes.

"Is it so, Charles?" asked his mother. "Is it so? Have you indeed been in captivity?"

"I have, dear mother ! I have !" he answered, in a voice choked with emotion.

Drawing back, Mrs. Huntly gazed upon him with a look of unutterable affection ; and then turning to me she said, somewhat coldly :

"Francis, how could you deceive me ! I did not think this of you."

I was about to reply, when Lilian turned quickly round and confronted her mother :

"Mother," she said, "do not speak in that manner ! If Francis did not tell us all, it was because he feared to give us unnecessary pain. Was it not so?" she asked, appealing to me with her soft, blue eyes.

"It was !" I replied, struggling to command my feelings ; "it was, dear Lilian—God bless you for an angel, it was !"

"I crave your pardon !" said Mrs. Huntly, taking my hand. "I did not intend to wound your feelings, Francis, and sincerely believe you did all for the best. But the suddenness of the news, the shock, surprised and alarmed me, and I did not heed what I said. I now know it was all for the best ; for had I known that Charles was lost, I fear the result might have been fatal. Thank God," she continued, turning again to her son, "that you are safe before me now ! Oh, Charles, my son," she added, covering her eyes with her hands to conceal her emotion, "you must never, never, leave me again !"

"Never, mother," he answered, solemnly; "never, while life remains!"

"And this," said Lilian, turning fondly to me, "is why you became so agitated whenever I mentioned my brother! I understand it all now. And this, too, is the cause of your abrupt departure, which has ever appeared so singular to me, and over which Eva and I have speculated many an hour without solving the mystery."

"And did my departure indeed appear so singular, sweet Lilian?" I inquired, in surprise. "Did I not tell you I was going to seek your brother?"

"Ay! but you forget you did not tell me he was lost—and we, you know, supposed him then in Boston. There was nothing so remarkable in your going to meet him, as in the hurried manner in which you departed, without any previous notice, as if you had heard bad tidings. It was this that put us to conjecture."

"True, I did overlook that."

"Well, well, dear Francis, never mind; you are here again; and now we must hear the tale of your adventures, and how you found Charles?"

"Yes," rejoined Mrs. Huntly, "I am all anxiety to hear the story."

"Who shall tell it?" asked I.

"You, Frank," answered Charles. "You can tell it better than I."

The tale I told: beginning with the loss of my friend at Pueblo de los Angeles, and its subsequent effect upon me, up to the time when I met with his mother and sister near the South Pass of the Rocky Mountains. I then narrated my last adventure, and gave a brief description of the scenes already laid before the reader, and how I had, little by little, traced Charles to the very spot of his captivity, only to find that another had released him. This led me to speak more fully than I had previously done of Prairie Flower, whom I again described as a beautiful being, and as good as she was beautiful. I recalled to mind how she had, at the risk of her life, appeared to warn the emigrants on that memorable night while journeying over the Rocky Mountains. I then reverted to Charles, and how I had found him in com-

pany with the tribe. In fact, I gave an outline of all the principal incidents of interest, carefully avoiding any allusion to the attachment existing between my friend and Prairie Flower, as also that we had any conjectures as to who the latter might be, or that she had accompanied us on our last journey.

During the recital, both Mrs. Huntly and Lilian listened eagerly, occasionally interrupting me with some question or exclamation, when the incidents detailed were unusually exciting. In fact, whenever I described a scene of danger to myself, Lilian would press close to my side, and gaze up into my face, pale and breathless, sometimes shuddering at the picture called up in her mind, and seem to hang upon my words as intently as though they were actually imparting life or death to him she loved. Nay, more than this: On several occasions did she become so lost in the thrilling tale, as to utter exclamations of horror; and then, remembering where she was, she would clasp my hand with a hearty pressure, and in a low voice thank God for my deliverance and present safety.

"And where is this beautiful Indian maiden now?" she asked when I had done. "What a singular being! Oh, I should love her so for her goodness, and her kindness to those so dear to me."

"Ay, Lilian, you would indeed love her," I answered; "for she is one of the sweetest beings you ever knew."

"Always excepting Eva," she rejoined playfully.

"Nay, Lilian, I will except no one but your own sweet self."

"But what has become of this Prairie Flower?" inquired Mrs. Huntly. "You did not tell us where you had left her."

"And what if I should say she is near at hand?"

"Near at hand?" repeated Lilian.

"Explain, Francis?" added Mrs. Huntly.

"She crossed the mountains with us."

"Indeed! and where is she now?"

"Within sight of the lights of this great city."

"Is it possible! And why did you not bring her here at once?"

"Why, it was already late; and as she has several companions with her, we thought it better for the party to encamp and remain till morning, while we went forward and prepared you to receive them."

"Oh, I am so anxious to see her!" rejoined Lilian; "and so will Eva be when she hears of her. While she remains with us we will treat her as a sister."

"I believe you," returned I, pointedly, and fixing my eye upon Huntly, who blushed, and turned his head aside, but made no remark.

"Oh, what a surprise awaits Eva on the morrow!" pursued Lilian. "She does not dream you are here; and yet she has been praying for your return, with brother Charles, every day since you left."

"I thank her, from my heart, for her interest in our welfare! She is a noble girl."

"She is indeed!" rejoined Lilian, enthusiastic in praise of her friend; "and I love her as a sister—which I hope she may be ere long," she added, playfully, turning to her brother, who appeared not a little embarrassed. "Oh, Charles," continued Lilian, pursuing her train of thought, "if ever one being loved another without seeing him, dear Eva loves you—for your name is ever on her tongue."

"I am very grateful for it, certainly," replied Charles, evasively, feeling himself pressed for an answer.

"And well you may be, for her equal does not live!" persisted Lilian, with spirit, loth to quit the subject.

"Do not assert that!" returned I, with a smile. "You forget that Eva had a sister!"

"But who knows anything of her sister, Francis?"

"Ay, who knows?" answered I, reflecting on what I had suspected, and on what the morrow might reveal. "But come, Lilian, since Eva has so much place in your thoughts, tell me how it has fared with you both since last we met."

"Oh, as well as could be expected, and *you* away," she answered. "We have walked, and ridden, and played, and sung, and read, and talked, and wondered fifty times a day where you were, and when you would return, and if Charles would come with you, and so on.

To sum up, the summer and most of the autumn have passed—but somehow the time has been more tedious than I could have wished. There is not the society here to please us, and on the whole we have not been very well contented. There has been quite an addition of settlers here during the past season, and the village has much improved since you saw it. In fact, it begins to assume the aspect of a civilized town; but still I feel I could never be happy here.”

“And would you like to return to the East?”

“Oh, dearly!”

“You shall start in the spring, then!” I rejoined.

“Oh, that is joyful news! And Eva shall go also?”

“All that desire to accompany us, Lilian.”

“Eva will be so rejoiced at this! But mother has invested what little means she had in the purchase of land.”

“Well, that can be sold again: and it will have lost nothing in value, since the town has begun to flourish.”

“And will you go, mother?” asked Lilian.

“As my children desire,” answered Mrs. Huntly. “I shall leave all to you, my children. But, come! Charles is about to tell us of his captivity; and, although it is late, I am anxious to hear his tale.”

Thus ended my conversation for the time with Lilian; and forming a half circle around her brother, we all attentively listened to his thrilling narrative.

By the time he had concluded, the night was far advanced; and though I had a thousand things to say to Lilian, I deferred them all to another opportunity, and retired to rest with a lighter heart than I had known for many a long year.



CHAPTER XVII.

THEY MEET AT LAST.



WHEN I awoke on the following morning, the bright sun was already streaming through the half closed shutter of my room. Huntly was up and dressed and standing by my bed.

"Come, Frank, the sun is up before you, and breakfast is waiting!" he said.

At first I felt a little bewildered, as a person sometimes will in a strange place. But it was only momentary; and remembering where I was, I sprung to the floor, dressed hastily, and accompanied my friend to the larger apartment, where I found the table smoking with hot viands, and Lilian and her mother ready to welcome me with sweet smiles and cordial salutations.

"And how did you rest?" inquired Mrs. Huntly.

"Well!" I answered. "I slept soundly, I assure you, or I should have made my appearance ere this."

"I am glad to hear it, my son, for you needed rest. Lilian and I were not so fortunate; for the unusual events of last night drove all slumber from us, and we could do nothing but talk of you and Charles."

"I fear our presence, then," said I, smiling, "has robbed you of a sweet night's rest?"

"Do not be alarmed," returned Lilian, archly. "Your presence has been more beneficial than sleep, I assure you—and never did I behold daylight with more joy."

"That you might escape from your reflections—eh! Lilian?"

"That I might see you again," she rejoined, with one of her sweetest smiles.

"A kiss for that!" cried I, gaily.

And I took it.

The morning meal passed off cheerfully with all save Charles, who appeared somewhat gloomy, at times abstracted, and rarely spoke.

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"What is the matter, Charley?" inquired I. "One would look to see you cheerful, if not gay; and yet you are silent and thoughtful."

"I feel a little depressed in spirits," he answered. "But never mind me. I shall be myself in time. At present I am soberly inclined."

"Fatigue, perhaps?" suggested his mother.

"My father!" he answered, solemnly.

Instantly a dead silence prevailed, and the tears sprung to the eyes of both Mrs. Huntly and Lilian.

"But, come," added Charles, after a pause, "do not let me make you sad, my friends! You mourned my father bitterly, long ere I heard of his death. You must remember my cause for grief is recent."

"Alas!" sighed Mrs. Huntly; "we all mourn him still, and ever must."

Another gloomy silence succeeded.

"I saw Teddy this morning," at length pursued Charles, anxious to divert our thoughts from the painful channel into which his remarks had drawn them, "and I dispatched him to Prairie Flower, requesting the presence of herself and friends. She and they will soon be here."

"And I," added Lilian, "have seen Eva. It would have done you good to have witnessed her surprise and delight, on hearing the joyful tidings I imparted. I expect her here every moment. Ha! she is here now!" she added, rising; "I know her step;" and hastening to the door, she conducted the object of her remarks and Madame Mortimer into the apartment.

I hurriedly arose and advanced to meet them.

"Oh, I am so rejoiced to see you, Francis!" cried Eva, springing forward and extending both hands, which I shook warmly. "This is a joyful surprise indeed!"

"And I," said Madame Mortimer, coming up, "I, too, believe me, am most happy to welcome you back, as it were, to the land of the living! We have felt your loss severely—most severely, sir!" and the pressure of her hands, as she said this, convinced me that her words were not idly spoken.

"I feel myself most fortunate and happy in having such *friends*," I replied, emphasizing the last word; "and, I assure you, I am as rejoiced to meet them as they can be to see me. But, come! let me present you to my long lost friend!" and turning to Huntly, who had risen from his seat, I introduced both mother and daughter together.

Huntly bowed low to each, and, with unusual embarrassment for him, said it gave him extreme pleasure to meet with those whom he had seen years before, in a moment of peril, and of whom he had since heard so much from me.

I particularly noted the countenance of Eva, who now beheld Charles Huntly for the first time. As I presented her, she turned pale, then crimsoned to the eyes, then took a faltering step forward, as if to meet him, but finally paused and let her eyes sink to the floor, seemingly greatly embarrassed.

Not so with Madame Mortimer. With a quick step she instantly advanced toward Charles, who met her half way, seized his proffered hand, and frankly said, in a voice tremulous with emotion:

"God bless you, Charles Huntly! I am most happy to behold you. You, sir, and your friend, both strangers then, saved the life of my daughter, at the risk of your own. You have both had a fond mother's prayers for your safety and happiness ever since; but until now I have never had an opportunity of expressing to you individually my most lasting obligations;" and she turned away her face to conceal the springing tears.

"You owe me no obligations," returned my friend frankly. "If ever there were any due, they have long since been canceled in your kindness to those I love. I did but my duty; and if the adventure was perilous at the time, it certainly brought its own reward afterward in a satisfied conscience."

Here he rested his eyes upon Eva, with an expression as of uncertainty whether to advance to her side or remain where he was. At the same time Eva looked up, their eyes met, and, with a simultaneous movement, each approached and took the other by the hand.

"Oh, sir!" began Eva, in a timid voice, and then paused, while her snowy hand trembled with agitation. Then making a struggle to appear calm, she added: "I—I—am very—very grateful;" and the last word died away in an almost inaudible murmur.

What a perplexing predicament for my friend! Before him stood the first being he had ever loved, beyond the love filial and fraternal. She stood before him, face to face, her hand trembling in his, and her voice sounding the sweet words of a grateful heart in his ear. That voice and those words which once would have made him frantic with rapture; which once would have sent the hot blood to his heart, only that it might again leap in burning streams through his swollen veins; which once, in short, would have made him the happiest of mortals. How was it now? Time and circumstances work great changes in the human heart, and my friend was changed—at least changed in that impassioned sentiment he had once felt for the object before him. He was not cold and indifferent—not insensible to her lovely charms and noble virtues. No! he was affected—deeply affected—affected to tears by her look and language. He loved her still—but with a modified love—the love of a brother for a sister—the love which is founded on esteem, for the high and noble qualities possessed by another, without regard to mere personalities. There was no ardency—no passion. No! all this was gone—transferred to another. *Prairie Flower* alone held the heart of *Charles Huntly*.

"Miss Mortimer," replied my friend—"or rather let me call you Eva—I am most happy to meet you; and feel it is I, rather than you, who ought to be grateful, for having been permitted to do an act which has already repaid me ten-fold. I hold that every virtuous deed bears with it its own reward. Pray, be seated, and we will talk further!"

"Ay," chimed in *Madame Mortimer*, "and you shall give us, *Charles*, some of your own adventures. *Lilian* has already told me something, and I am anxious to hear more. She says you are indebted to a beautiful Indian

maiden for both life and liberty—certainly a heavy obligation on your part.”

“I feel it to be so,” rejoined Huntly, changing color.

“And who is this Indian girl? and to what tribe does she belong? The daughter of some great chief, I suppose—for in all novels, you know, the heroine must be some great personage, either acknowledged or unknown.”

“But you forget, madam,” returned Huntly, smiling, “that the heroine in this case, as you are pleased to term *Prairie Flower*, is an individual in real life; whereas in novels the heroine alone exists in the imagination of the author, and can be whatever he may see proper to make her. Therefore you should not be surprised should she turn out to be some humble individual.”

“Well,” answered Madame Mortimer, “all romance is much alike, whether imaginary or real; for the novelist, if true to his calling, must draw his scenes from real life; and hence I may be permitted to suppose the heroine in this case a person of some consequence.”

“And so she may be for what we know to the contrary,” said I, joining in.

“And do you not know who she is, then?” asked Madame Mortimer.

“We know nothing positively.”

“Is she not the daughter of a chief?”

“No.”

“Is she beautiful?” asked Eva, giving me a peculiar look.

“Very beautiful,” replied I, glancing at Charles, who colored and seemed a little confused.

Both Eva and her mother caught the expression of Huntly’s countenance, and the latter said:

“Then perhaps Charles has lost his heart to her?”

Eva turned to him quickly, with a searching glance, and immediately added:

“I believe he has—for he changes color at the mere mention of her name;” and her own features, as she spoke, grew a shade paler.

“One has his heart that is nearer at hand,” observed

Lilian, who, with her mother, had been standing a silent spectator of what had passed.

"I pray you drop this jesting!" said Huntly, with an effort to appear careless and unconcerned.

"Nay, but I must know more of this singular personage," pursued Madame Mortimer, "for I feel deeply interested in her. A girl that could and would do what she has done, can be no ordinary being."

"So think I," added Mrs. Huntly.

"And so you will find her," I rejoined.

"I am dying to see her," said Lilian.

"She must have taken great interest in the fate of Charles, to seek him out in captivity," observed Madame Mortimer. "Is it not so, Francis?"

"Her motto of life is to do all the good she can," I answered, rather evasively. "She would take an interest in any one who chanced to be in trouble."

"God bless her, then, for a true heart!" was the response.

"But how came she to think of visiting Oregon?" asked Eva.

"We persuaded her to accompany us hither," I replied. "As she once saved both our lives, and afterward ransomed Charles from slavery, not forgetting that night, which you all remember, when she gave us timely warning of danger, whereby much bloodshed was averted, I thought you would like to see and thank her."

"And you were right," said Lilian. "Oh, Eva, we will love her as a sister, will we not?"

"Certainly," answered Eva, rather abstractedly, and evidently not so well pleased with the idea of her being present as Lilian; "certainly, we will love her as a sister."

Could a faint, a very faint, spark of jealousy have begun to burn in her breast? I observed her closely, and drew my own conclusions.

Meantime Huntly had remained seated, apparently indifferent to everything said. Was he indifferent?

And why did Eva suddenly become so thoughtful and abstracted? Was she thinking of Prairie Flower? and did she fear a rival in an Indian maiden?—for I had never intimated she was other than an Indian.

My design, as previously stated, was to bring all parties together, and leave matters to take their own course ; and I now felt anxious for all the actors to be on the stage, that I might witness the *denouement*.

For some time the conversation went on, gradually changing from Prairie Flower to my friend, who was called upon to narrate some of his adventures.

Anxious to entertain those present, and divert his thoughts from other subjects, he began the recital of a thrilling scene, in which he was an inactive, though not unconcerned spectator, and had already reached the most exciting part, holding his listeners breathless with interest, when Teddy entered the apartment in haste, exclaiming :

"Your honor—" Then pausing, as he saw who were present, and making a low bow, he quickly added : "Me most obadient respects to all o' yees, by token I've saan vees afore."

"Well, well, Teddy—have they come?" inquired I, impatiently.

"Troth, and they has, your honor ! and that's jist what I 's a-going to say, whin the likes o' so many beautiful ladies put me out a bit."

"And where are they now, Teddy?"

"Jist round the corner, as ye may say."

"Remain here, and I will soon set Prairie Flower before you," said I, addressing the others, who were now all excitement to behold my fair friend.

And I hurried from the cot, followed by Teddy.

CHAPTER XVIII.

THE LONG LOST FOUND.



FOUND Prairie Flower seated upon her little pony, in company with her Indian friends, pale and agitated, but looking more beautiful than ever. She wore a plain, neat dress, without ornament, which fitted her person

well, and displayed her airy, symmetrical figure to the best advantage. Her dark, glossy hair was braided and arranged, if not *a la mode*, at least in most exquisite taste, and altogether her appearance was such as could not offend the searching gaze of the most fastidious critic. All trace of the Indian was gone; and gazing upon her sweet, modest countenance, one could hardly realize that her life, for the most part, had been spent in the wilderness, among the red children of the forest.

"And how fares my fair friend this morning?" I said, with a smile, as I came up.

"But indifferently well," she answered, dismounting.

"I fear you did not rest well last night."

"I did not rest at all," she replied. "How could I rest, sir, with such momentous thoughts as kept me company? Oh, sir," she added vehemently, placing her hand upon her heart, "here, here were strange feelings, strange emotions, strange yearnings, but all powerful as strange, and they kept my senses from slumber. Every nerve was then strained, and I felt strong. But now—I am weak—very weak;" and as she spoke, she rested her hand on the neck of her little pony for support.

"Come," said I, advancing to her side, "take my arm, and I will conduct you hence. It is intense excitement which so unnerves you; but you must not give way to it. It is necessary, for the present, that you should be calm, and not lose your wonted presence of mind."

"And whither would your conduct me?" she timidly inquired.

"Within this humble cottage."

"And—and—are—*they* there—of—of whom you spoke?" she fairly gasped.

"Yes; they await your presence, to thank you for all your kindness."

"And do—do—they *know*?" she asked, emphasizing the last word, clasping my hand, and fixing her dark eyes, with a singular expression, upon mine.

"They know nothing, Prairie Flower, but that you are the author of many noble deeds, for which they are your debtors, and for which they are anxious to return you heart-felt thanks. My friend and I thought it best to bring you together without even hinting our surmises."

"It was a happy thought in you," she replied, with some reassurance; "I am glad you did so; I am glad they know nothing; and I will try to be calm and appear indifferent. But, sir, believe me, this is a great trial! I have been used to danger all my life; I have even stood upon the field of carnage, where the fierce battle raged, and the deadly missiles were whirling past me, fairly hissing in my ear, and there have striven to succor the wounded; I have had my life in danger many times, when I believed every moment would be my last; I have, for many years, seen much hardship and peril; but never, sir, a moment like the present; never a time when I felt my soul shrink within me, and refuse to do my bidding as now—never a time when I had less self-command and felt I needed it more. I am about to enter the presence of those whose blood, perchance, runs in my veins; and the doubt, the uncertainty, the hopes and fears, which are based upon this bare possibility, are mighty in their strength. Oh, sir, such wild, strange feelings as rush over me at the thought, are beyond the utterance of mortal tongue—words could not express them. But I will say no more. I keep them waiting. I will nerve myself. I am ready."

"But perhaps your friends here had better wait till this first interview is over."

"True," she added, "they must not witness it;" and

turning, she addressed a few words to them, and then signified that she was ready.

At this moment my eye fell upon several of the villagers, who were sauntering toward us, attracted, some of them perhaps by curiosity, and others by the news of my arrival. As I did not care to see any at present, I said a word to Prairie Flower, and we hastened our steps to the threshold of the cottage.

"Courage !" I whispered, and led her in with a faltering step.

All eyes were instantly fastened upon her, and the united mental comment was, "How beautiful !" Prairie Flower, pale and trembling, could not return their gaze, but sunk her own to the ground.

"My friends," I said, "I herewith present you our fair benefactress, to whom two of us at least, if not all present, are indebted for our lives. This is the Prairie Flower of whom you have so often heard ; and, taking a slight liberty with her name. I may be permitted to term her the Flower of the Wilderness."

As I spoke, each of the ladies rose and advanced to meet her, but Lilian was the first to gain her side. With a quick step she came forward, and, taking the inactive hands of Prairie Flower in her own, said, in a frank, affectionate tone :

"Welcome, sweet maiden, to the home of those who, already love you for your many virtues ! I have—"

At this moment Prairie Flower raised her eyes to those of the speaker, whose countenance suddenly changed to a look of bewildered surprise ; and taking a step backward, she clasped her hands and ejaculated :

"Good heavens ! how remarkable !"

"The charm works," whispered I to my friend, who had silently joined me.

He pressed my hand nervously, but said nothing.

"Yes, welcome to our humble abode, Prairie Flower," said Mrs. Huntly, who, her gaze riveted upon the fair maiden, had not as yet noticed the surprise and agitation of her daughter. "Eh ! what ! how !" she added the next moment, as the dark eyes of Prairie Flower in turn rested upon hers ; and she glanced quickly toward Eva,

Madame Mortimer and Lilian, and then back again upon Prairie Flower, as if uncertain what to think or how to act.

"I thank you—for—for—your kindness!" faltered Prairie Flower, again dropping her eyes to the ground, and evidently scarcely able to support herself from sinking.

At the moment Mrs. Huntly spoke, Eva had extended her hand within a step of Prairie Flower, and her lips were just parted to utter a welcome, when the same look, which had surprised the former, arrested her motions and held her spell-bound, as if suddenly transformed to a statue of marble.

But it was Madame Mortimer who now fixed my whole attention. She had come up a little behind the others, with an expression of patronizing, benevolent curiosity on her fine, matronly features. The first glance at Prairie Flower had changed the idle look of curiosity to one of surprise at her maiden beauty and the absence of that distinguishing mark of the Indian which she had expected to find. The next moment she evidently became struck with her strong resemblance to Eva, which had so surprised each of the others; and a sudden vague, wild thought—a suspicion—a something undefinable—rushed over her half bewildered brain; and her features grew ashy pale, her bosom heaved, and her very lips turned white with internal emotions.

But it was when Prairie Flower spoke that you should have seen her. There was something in that voice that seemed to thrill every nerve, and then take away all power of motion—suspend every animal function. At the first sound, she leaned a little forward, one hand, unconsciously as it were, stretched toward the speaker, and the other instinctively clasping her forehead; while the blood, rushing upward, crimsoned her features, and then, retreating to her heart, left them paler than ever. Her lips parted, her eyes seemed starting from their sockets, her heaving breast ceased its throbbing, and she stood transfixed to the ground, motionless and mute, apparently without life, or only that life of surprised and bewildered inaction which the master of the

passions sometimes transfuses into the otherwise inanimate object of his creation. It was a strange and impressive picture, and one that would have made the fame and fortune of any artist who could have accurately transferred it to canvas.

A momentary silence prevailed, a deathly silence, that seemingly had in it the awful calm preceding the frightful tempest. For a brief space no one moved, no one spoke, and, I may add, no one breathed; for the internal excitement had suspended respiration. There they stood, as I have described them, a wonderful group—sweet Prairie Flower as the central figure and object of interest, the cynosure of all eyes, and, if I may be permitted the expression, the very soul of all thought. Just behind Prairie Flower stood Huntly, my hand clasped in his and suffering from its pressure.

Madame Mortimer was the first to move—the first to break the silence. Suddenly taking a step forward, between Mrs. Huntly and Eva, and clasping her hands before her, her eyes still riveted upon Prairie Flower, she exclaimed, in a hoarse whisper, that had something sepulchral in its sound:

“Merciful God! who are you? Speak! speak! In Heaven’s name, who are you?”

Prairie Flower looked up wildly, clasped her hands, fixed her eyes upon the other, and trembled violently, but made no answer.

“Who are you?” cried Madame Mortimer again. “For God’s sake, speak! and break this terrible spell of painful, bewildering uncertainty! Speak! I charge you, speak!”

But the lips of Prairie Flower gave forth no sound.

“Speak you!” continued Madame Mortimer, wildly, appealing to me: “Speak any! speak all! but speak somebody! and tell me I am not in a dream—a dream from which it would be terrible to wake and know it but a dream!”

“You do not dream,” said I; “and, I have every reason to believe, are standing in the presence of——”

“Whom?” she gasped.

“*Your long lost daughter!*”

"Ah!" she shrieked: "God of mercy! I thought so!" and, staggering forward, she threw out her arms, fell heavily upon the breast of Prairie Flower, and swooned in her embrace.

CHAPTER XIX.

MOTHER AND DAUGHTER.



O describe minutely what occurred during the first half hour after this singular meeting between mother and daughter, is wholly beyond my power—for I was too much excited myself to note anything distinctly. For a time all was uproar and confusion—persons running to and fro, calling for this thing and that, and uttering exclamations of alarm, surprise and bewilderment.

Madame Mortimer was borne in an unconscious state to an adjoining apartment, where such restoratives as could be had were speedily applied, for a long time without success; while Prairie Flower, more dead than alive, was conducted to a seat; where Eva, the first alarm for her mother over, flew to embrace her, to twine her arms around her neck, call her "Dear, dear sister!" and weep and laugh alternately as one insane.

Lilian and her mother seemed completely bewildered; and were now with Madame Mortimer, and anon with Prairie Flower, aiding the recovery of the one, wondering over the other, and continually uttering, "How strange! how strange!"

Charles, pale as a corpse, had sunk upon a seat, and, with his face buried in his hands, sat in silence; while I, after running up and down the room several times, found myself, much to my surprise, alone in the center of the apartment and dancing for very joy.

At last everything began to assume a more tranquil and sane appearance. Prairie Flower found vent to her

feelings in a flood of tears upon the breast of Eva, who, as she put in now and then a soothing word, begging the other to be calm, mingled her own tears with her sister's; while Lilian and her mother wept in sympathy of joy; and my own eyes, by the spontaneous action of an overflowing soul, would, in spite of myself, occasionally grow dim. Madame Mortimer, too, gradually regained her senses; and, looking hurriedly about her, anxiously inquired for her long lost daughter. Prairie Flower was at once conducted to her side, whither we all followed to witness the interview.

For something like a minute, Madame Mortimer gazed upon her daughter without speaking, during which her features displayed all the varying expressions of a mother's tender, yearning love for a long lost child. Then taking the hands of Prairie Flower, she glanced along the arms, and trembled like an aspen.

"It is my child!" at length escaped her lips, in that deep tone by which the very soul gives utterance: "It is my child! the long-lost—the sadly-wept—the deeply-mourned! Yes—the lost is found—the dead restored to life!" Then pausing, clasping her hands and looking upward, she added: "God! all merciful, all wise, and all just—for this I thank Thee, from the inner depths of a grateful heart! This moment's happiness, oh God, hath canceled long years of suffering and sorrow; and henceforth the study of my life shall be to glorify Thy holy name."

During this brief, solemn, but heart-felt offering of gratitude to the Great Author of the Universe, Prairie Flower gradually sunk upon her knees beside the bed on which the speaker was lying, and, covering her face with her hands, appeared to be lost in silent devotion. Then she arose, and, gazing upon Madame Mortimer, with a look of ineffable affection, she uttered the single word "Mother!" threw herself upon the breast of the latter, was strained to her heart, and the tears of both mingled together.

It was a touching scene.

"And now, my sweet child," said Madame Mortimer pressing her lips warmly to the other's, "my long lost

Evaline Mortimer—for by that name, which you bore in infancy, you must henceforth be known—tell me something of yourself? and how you came to be found among the Indians?”

Prairie Flower—or Evaline, as I will hereafter term her—started, turned pale, and sighed heavily, but did not reply. At once I comprehended her thoughts and hastened to relieve her; for I saw in her look a secret dread, lest the unrevealed secret in her possession might even now dash the cup of joy from her lips, by proving her the child of another.

“She knows but little of her own history,” I began; and then I went on to recount our first suspicions as to whom she might be, and what had followed, up to her finding the hidden box, which probably contained a statement of the facts, but which she, for reasons explained, had not yet examined.

“Alas,” sighed Evaline, “and that is what troubles me now! I fear there may have been some mistake; and if, oh God! there——”

“Give yourself no uneasiness, my child!” interrupted Madame Mortimer; “for you are my child, I feel and know; and, for my own satisfaction, I would never seek other proof than what I have found, your likeness to Eva, and a mother’s yearnings. But if *you* have any doubt, examine your left arm, and you there will find a scar, in the form of a quarter moon, which was the result of an accident to Evaline Mortimer in her infancy.”

Evaline started, and hurriedly sought for the proof. We all pressed forward to examine the arm. There, sure enough, just below the elbow, the identical scar could be traced—dim, it is true, but still the scar of the quarter moon.

Evaline gazed upon it for a moment, pale and faint with joyful emotions; and then, turning her soft, dark eyes above, with the sublime look of a saint, and clasping her hands, she said, solemnly:

“God, I thank Thee!”

“My sister—my sweet, long lost sister!” said Eva, affectionately, gently twining her arms around the neck

of the other and gazing upward also ; " I, too, thank God for this ! "

Evaline turned, clasped the other in her arms, and the beautiful twin sisters wept in each other's embrace.

" What a singular meeting is this ! " observed Mrs. Huntly to Madame Mortimer, who now, completely recovered, arose from the bed. " And how remarkable that both you and I should have a long lost child restored to us at the same time ! "

" Yes," answered the other, " God sometimes works in wonders, and this is wonderful ! But not the least remarkable of all is the fact, that some years since your son saved the life of my daughter, and subsequently my daughter saved the life of your son—though each at the time wholly unknown to the other, with no apparent connection between the two striking events. The good we do returns to us, as the evil of our lives often falls heavily upon our heads. I have experienced both ; " and she sighed heavily. " But come, my daughter," she added, turning to Evaline, " you have friends with you whom we have long kept waiting. We must now entertain them, or they will think themselves slighted, and with good reason. When everything is properly arranged and settled, we will have those secret documents produced and hear your tale. "

As she spoke, she led the way to the larger apartment.

" Charley," I whispered, " I fear we have forgotten to congratulate Prairie Flower on the happy termination of this interview and change of name ! "

He pressed my hand and answered :

" You must be spokesman, then—for at present I am unable to express my feelings. "

" Be it so—but you must accompany me ; " and advancing to Prairie Flower, I took her hand and said :

" I give you joy, Evaline Mortimer ! and so does my friend here, though at present too bashful to say it. "

Both Charles and Evaline blushed and became embarrassed. But quickly recovering herself, the latter returned :

" I thank you—thank you both—from my heart ! "

But for you, this might never have been ;" and her eyes instantly filled with grateful tears.

"But for you, dear Evaline," rejoined I, "*we* might never have been here. The obligation is on our side—we are the debtors."

"Prairie Flower," began Huntly, taking her disengaged hand and making an effort to command himself—"Or rather, I should say, Evaline—I—I—Well, you understand ! Imagine all I would say—for just now I can say nothing."

"Bravo, Charley !" cried I, laughing and giving him a friendly slap on the shoulder. "Bravo, my dear fellow ! Spoken like yourself !"

"Hush !" he returned, with a gesture of displeasure ; "do not jest with me now, Frank !"

Meantime I noticed that Eva and Lilian watched the features of both Evaline and Charles closely, and then whispered to each other, and smiled, and again looked earnestly at the two.

"The secret is out," thought I.

At this moment Madame Mortimer, observing us together, approached and addressed my friend, with a bland smile :

"Said I not, Charles, that the heroine of this life-romance must necessarily be a personage of consequence ?"

"And I am rejoiced that your words are verified," was the reply.

'Thank you ! and thank God that I have found them verified in a way I little expected ! But all heroines, you know, must fall in love !' she added, laughing. "How is it in the present case, eh ?"

"It turns out on the most approved plan," I answered, pointedly, glancing at both Charles and Evaline, who, judging from their looks, wished themselves for the moment anywhere but where they stood.

"I am rejoiced to hear it," rejoined the good dame.

"And how is it with you, Eva ?" I asked, playfully.

"Why, I suppose I must resign all pretensions," she replied, in her wonted light tone. "Of course I was anxious to make a conquest—as what young lady is not ?"

But I see there is no chance for me," she pursued glancing slyly at my friend; "and so I will just make a virtue of necessity, pretend I don't care anything about it, and, heigh-ho! look somewhere else, with the old proverb, 'Better luck next time.' Ay," she added, springing to the blushing Evaline, and imprinting a kiss on her sweet lips, "I am too happy in finding a sister, to mourn long for a lover—more especially if a certain somebody (again glancing at Charles,) has any design of becoming a relation."

"Well said!" I rejoined. "And now, Charley—"

"Hist!" he exclaimed, interrupting and dragging me away. "Come," he added, "let us take a stroll;" and arm-in-arm we quitted the cottage.

Considerable of a crowd had already collected around our Indian friends, and were listening to a story from Teddy, who, as he privately expressed himself to me, "Was in all the glory of making the spalpeens belave himsilf and us the heroes of a hundred mighty fights, and battles, and scimmages, and hair-length escapes, and thim things."

Among the number present I recognized several of my old acquaintances, who appeared much delighted to see me, and to whom I introduced my long lost friend.

After the usual commonplace observations were over, I turned to Teddy, and gave him instructions to conduct the Indians into the cottage forthwith, and then see to having their horses well taken care of.

This done, Huntly and I sauntered down through the village, to note the improvements, and talk over the important events of the last few hours.

As Lilian had said I would, I found the village of Oregon City greatly altered for the better. and that it had already begun to assume the appearance of a thriving settlement. During the past season there had been a large influx of population from the East, the effects of which were everywhere visible in new dwellings and workshops. Some three or four merchants had come on with goods, opened stores and were now doing a thriving business, in disposing of their commodities at the most extravagant prices. A grist-mill and saw-mill had also been erected

on the Willamette, and were now in active operation—the former grinding out the staff of life, and the latter supplying such of the settlers as desired habitations superior to log cabins with the necessary materials for more finished building. Here and there were the workshops of the carpenter, blacksmith, saddler, shoemaker and tailor—and, in short, everything necessary apparently to a business place.

Strolling down to the Willamette, we halted upon a bluff overlooking the romantic stream, and, as chance would have it, upon the very spot where I had offered my hand to Lilian.

"Here, Charley," said I, "is ground which to me is sacred. Can you not guess from what cause?"

He only answered by pressing my arm and heaving a deep sigh.

"Come," added I, smiling, "a wager I can guess your thoughts!"

"Well?"

"You are thinking of Evaline."

He changed color and sighed:

"Well?"

"And now you begin to have doubts that all may not terminate as you desire!"

"You are good at guessing," he rejoined, gazing solemnly down upon the current below.

"Courage, man!" rejoined I. "Never despair on the point of victory!"

"Ah!" he sighed; "if I could be assured of that."

"Assured, Charley! What more assurance would you have? She loves you; I will vouch for that; and now that the mystery hanging over her early life is cleared up, you have nothing to do but be yourself and ask her hand."

"Do you think so?" he cried, suddenly confronting me with an eager look. "Do you think so, Frank?"

"Do I think so?" I repeated. "Why, where is your wonted assurance? Do I think so? No! I do not think—I know!"

"But I—I—somehow—I have my misgivings."

"Pshaw, my friend—love's misgivings only. If you

had not these, I should put it down as a solemn fact that you did not love. She has her misgivings, too—but they spring from the same source as yours, and amount to exactly the same thing—that is, nothing. Why, how you have changed! You are as timid as a schoolboy at his first public declamation, and tremble more in the presence of one beautiful being, than you did in the clutches of a fierce banditti. Throw aside this foolish bashfulness, and act like a sensible fellow! There is nothing so very alarming in telling a young maiden you love and adore her, when you once set yourself about it. I have tried it, and speak from experience. Once, I remember, you talked the matter of matrimony over as deliberately as if making a bargain and sale—purchasing or transferring property.”

“Ay,” he answered, musingly, “but it was merely talk then—*now* it is quite a different thing. If—if—she should refuse——”

“Nonsense!” interrupted I, laughing; and then I added, imitating him: “If—if—you should refuse, why——”

“Cease!” he exclaimed, almost angrily. “Why will you be ever jesting, Frank?”

“That I may bring you to sober earnest, Charley.”

In like conversation we wailed away an hour or two, and then returned to the cottage—Huntly in a better flow of spirits than I had seen him for many a day.

The news of our arrival—the restoration of a long lost daughter to the arms of her mother—together with exaggerated and marvellous reports of the whole affair—had already made the dwelling of Mrs. Huntly a place of attraction to the villagers, whom we here found collected in goodly numbers of both sexes. In fact the house was thronged throughout the day, and both Huntly and myself were kept busy in recounting our exploits to curious and eager listeners.

Night, however, came at last, and with its approach departed our visitors, much to our relief and gratification.

CHAPTER XX.

UNRAVELLING A MYSTERY.



IT was about an hour after nightfall, that, everything having become quiet, we formed a pleasant circle before a bright fire, in the dwelling of Mrs. Huntly, to hear the tale of Evaline Mortimer.

Throughout the day, all had been too busy in entertaining guests to attend to private affairs; but now the transient visitors had departed, and none were by to listen save those most deeply interested.

Evaline, in the course of the day, had managed to steal away, for an hour, during which she had opened her "treasure-box," as she termed it, wherein she had found a parchment in the hand-writing of Great Medicine, whose contents she had eagerly devoured, and the substance of which, together with what she knew of herself, she was now about to lay before us.

"Come," said Madame Mortimer, after some trifling conversation had passed: "Come, dear Evaline, now for the romance of your life! We are all eager for the story."

"And when I have told it," said Evaline in reply, smiling sweetly, "I shall have told a tale to which no mortal ear has ever before listened, and a portion of which has been unknown to myself till within the last few hours. I have examined the record of Great Medicine, and find much therein I did not know before; but still, with all the knowledge gained therefrom, I should have remained ignorant of the most important period of my history—important to me at least—but for this providential meeting with my dear mother and sister—the former of whom can perhaps put the connecting link between what I know and my birth.

"As the narration on the whole is rather disconnected, I will tell the story in my own way, and thus in

a more direct form bring to bear all the knowledge I have regarding myself and those with whom my fortune has been linked.

"My earliest impressions are of Great Medicine, and the Indians with whom he was associated. Of his early history I could never learn anything authentic. It was current with the tribe, that he had come from afar, had formerly been a great chief, and was now the sole remnant of his race. Some twelve or fifteen years prior to the period I speak of, or say a little more than thirty years ago, he had appeared among the various tribes then located in one of the more eastern territories, and had brought with him three white missionaries of the Moravian school, who had at once set to work to convert the savages to the Christian faith. The influence of the old man—for even then Great Medicine was well advanced in years—tended much to allay the vindictive feelings which the savages were disposed to manifest toward his white friends, and to which they were secretly urged on by British agents—this, as you will bear in mind, being the period of the commencement of hostilities between America and Great Britain. The result of the matter was, that several of the Indians became converts to the true faith, renounced the barbarisms of their ancestors, and threw down their war implements to take them up no more. These converts were of various tribes, and were subsequently by each tribe denounced as impostors and squaws, and persecuted in many cases even to the death—so that the survivors were obliged to abandon their homes and seek safety in flight. These fugitives, by an arrangement of Great Medicine, all gathered together, and in solemn conclave formed themselves into a tribe, of which he was appointed chief, or rather Great Medicine, for the title of chief was by them abolished. A mode of worship was then established, of which several songs, composed by the missionaries, formed a striking feature, and made the ceremonies more impressive than they might otherwise have been."

"And these songs," interrupted I, "were the same you once translated to me?"

"The same," answered the sweet narrator, "with the

exception of what they may have gained or lost by the peculiar dialect finally adopted by the new-formed tribe. The ceremonies of this tribe," she continued, "were not all established at once, and may now differ somewhat from those of the time in question, though the same I believe in the main features.

"As the Indian, by nature and association, is peculiarly fitted to believe in the marvelous, it is not surprising that some portion of this reverence for the supernatural should have clung to those of the new faith; and in consequence of this, Great Medicine was supposed to be invested with powers beyond the mere mortal. Whether he believed this of himself, I am unable to say; but certain it is, he took care the rest should think so; and ever excluding himself from the tribe, except when his presence was absolutely necessary, he succeeded by his peculiarities, eccentricities, strange incantations and the like, in drawing around himself a vail of mystery which none ever presumed to penetrate. On the whole, he was a very strange being; and though all loved, all feared him; and none ever knew for a certainty who he was or whence he came. If one presumed to question him, it was only for once. The silent look he received from that small, dark eye, was enough. It thrilled and overawed him, and he turned away, resolved never to question him again. Even I, whom he ever treated with affectionate care—who was constantly admitted to his presence when all others were excluded—who had the advantage of being with him in his most meditative and communicative moods—even I, was never made wiser than my companions. As I have said once before, he ever remained an enigma without a solution. Like the rest, I loved and I feared him—with this difference, perhaps—that the former with me was the stronger of the two passions. But to return from this slight digression.

"The tribe, organized under the control of Great Medicine, for a time flourished well, and constantly increased by new converts from the neighboring tribes. But this nearly proved its overthrow. The other tribes at last became jealous, and declared if this state of things continued their villages would become depopulated. They

swore revenge, and took it, and most dire revenge it was. They made a descent upon their harmless friends, and with ruthless hands slew their own relatives, and took the missionaries captives, whom they afterward put to the tortures. It was a terrible massacre—a massacre without resistance on the part of the victims, whose peculiar tenets of religion forbade them to fight even in defense of their lives. At one fell swoop nearly all were cut off. None, upon whom the bloodthirsty assailants laid hands, were spared. Women and children—the infant at the breast—the promising youth and tender maiden—the man in the prime of life and the hoary-headed veteran: all were alike victims—all shared one common fate—all found a bloody grave.”

“What a terrible scene!” exclaimed Madame Mortimer, shuddering.

“Terrible! terrible!” echoed Lillian and Eva.

“And how many do you suppose perished?” asked Mrs. Huntly.

“I cannot say,” answered Evaline. “All I know is, that only a few escaped—some half a dozen, I believe—among whom was Great Medicine. They fled, fast and far, to another part of the wilderness, but still firm in that faith by which they had been so sorely tried. When hundreds of miles had been placed between them and their fierce enemies, they paused in their flight, and, selecting a pleasant spot, erected a few huts, and continued their devotions as before. Here they were visited by other tribes, who, knowing nothing of their history, and struck with their peculiarities and mode of worship, treated them with great respect and reverence, and called them the Wahsochee—equivalent to the English word Mysterious—by which name, and the title of their founder, they have ever since been known.

“Here Providence again favored them, and their numbers increased very rapidly. Their fame spread far and wide over the vast wilderness, and bold warriors from distant tribes came to see them, many of whom remained, converts to their faith. In this manner the Wahsochee village again became populous; and the different tribes, though at deadly enmity with one another,

all concurred in respecting and leaving them unmolested. As those who joined them were among the most intelligent of their race, and as these were from a great many nations, the language of each was gradually introduced, until, besides a dialect of their own, the tribe had the advantage of understanding that of almost every other of note.

"Thus for several years all went on prosperously, and their number had augmented from six to a hundred and fifty, when that fatal malady, the small-pox, broke out and swept off four-fifths of the nation. From this awful blow they never fully recovered—at least, never to be what they were before—for many who were on the point of joining them, were deterred by what they declared to be the angry frown of the Great Spirit; and although other tribes were scourged in like manner, still the more superstitious contended that the Wahsochee religion could not be good, or the Great Spirit would not have been angry with them, even though he were with their neighbors.

"This latter affliction occurred some two years prior to my being brought among them, of which mysterious event I shall now proceed to speak as I find it recorded by Great Medicine himself."

"Permit me a word, Evaline, before you proceed further?" said I, interrupting her. "Since you have briefly given the history of the Mysterious Tribe, may I inquire why it was, on our first acquaintance, you so strongly insisted I should not question you concerning yourself or companions?"

"In the first place," she replied, "Great Medicine had expressly declared (and his word was law with us) that nothing of our history must be told to strangers, whose desire to know, as a general thing, would proceed from idle curiosity, to gratify which would avail us nothing. In the second place, of my early history I was ignorant—at least of that which referred to my parentage—and to be questioned, ever caused me the most painful embarrassment; besides, of what I did know, I had promised the old man to reveal nothing. I knew I was not of the Indian race; but to admit this would lead to

a thousand other inquiries, which could not be satisfied, and which I felt a stranger had no right to make. Are you answered?"

"Fully and satisfactorily. Please go on with your story!"

"The location of the tribe, at the period of which I now speak," proceeded Evaline, "was near the Des Moines river, in the southern part of that territory since known as Iowa. While the tribe remained here, it was customary for Great Medicine to make a journey to St. Louis, as often as once a year, to trade his furs, skins, embroidered moccasins and the like, for powder, lead, beads, blankets, and whatever else he fancied the tribe might need. On his return from one of these excursions (so he gives the story), and when some ten miles above St. Louis, having fallen behind his party, he was overtaken by a fierce-looking horseman, who bore in his arms a little girl, some two or three years of age, and who at once accosted him, in a very gruff manner, demanding to know whither he was going. This horseman, he says, was a very villainous-looking white man, who wore a long, flowing beard, had a black, fiery eye, and was short in stature and heavy set.

"On hearing the reply of Great Medicine, the white man drew a pistol and dismounted, ordering him to dismount also. Once, he writes, he would have shot and scalped the bold intruder without a word; but now he had no such thoughts; and he obeyed him in silence, wondering what was to come next.

"'Here is a brat,' said the stranger, pointing to the child now crouching at his feet, 'which I wish out of the way, and am too much of a coward to effect my desires. Take her—it is your calling—and here is gold.'

"'You are mistaken in me,' replied Great Medicine, 'if you suppose I will aid your base ends. I would not kill that innocent little creature to own the world.'

"'You an Indian and say this!' cried the other, making use of a wicked oath. 'What in the name of Heaven ails the child, that all fear to harm her? She must die though; and if you will not undertake the job, why, then

there is no alternative ;' and he placed his pistol to her head.

" 'Stay!' cried the old man, beseechingly ; 'I will not harm her myself ; but if you wish to rid yourself of her, I will consent to place her far from civilization, and adopt her into my tribe.'

" 'But she is a child of consequence,' pursued the other, 'the daughter of one who is a great chief in his own country, and stands between me and fortune. Should she return——'

" 'There is no likelihood of that,' interrupted the other, 'as I shall take her some hundreds of miles into the wilderness.'

" 'But her father, who knows nothing of my design, and to whom I must report her lost or dead, may institute a search. How do I know she may not be found ?'

" 'That I think impossible,' rejoined the old man.

" 'But *this* will make all sure,' continued the dark stranger, again pointing the pistol at her head.

" 'Nay, hold!' cried the other, in alarm. 'If you dare to murder her, I will make her spirit haunt you forever !'

" 'You make her spirit haunt me ! Umph ! what are you but a decrepit old Indian ? By heavens ! I have a mind to murder you both. But I hate murder ; for in fact one never feels safe afterward. Do you believe in a God, old man ?—for you talk as one the world denominates a Christian.'

" 'I do believe in a God,' answered Great Medicine ; 'and if you dare to harm this child, His just retribution shall follow you, even to the remotest bounds of earth, time and eternity.'

" The other paused, reflected, and then added :

" 'I would not have her blood upon my soul, for I have sin enough there already. You think there is no danger of her being discovered ?'

" 'Not the least.'

" 'And you say you believe in a God ?'

" 'I do.'

" 'You hope for salvation, as men term it ?'

" 'I do.'

" 'Then swear, by your hopes of salvation, to keep

her among the Indians as long as you live—to adopt her into your tribe, and never to mortal ear to reveal a word concerning this interview, or how she came into your possession—that you will never attempt to trace out her parentage, nor make any inquiries concerning her,—swear to all this, and she is yours! Refuse, and her death and yours shall be the penalty!

“‘I swear to all!’ answered Great Medicine.

“‘Enough! take her and speed to the wilderness; while I will away and report her dead—murdered by the Indians,’ he added, with a grim smile. Then leaping upon his horse, he muttered, as he turned away: ‘All is safe, I think, for we shall soon be over the water;’ and the next moment both horse and rider were lost in the forest.

“‘This child,’ writes Great Medicine, ‘behold in yourself, Prairie Flower! and this is all I know of your early history.’”

“‘Strange!’ said Madame Mortimer, musingly. “Here is more mystery—I do not understand it. Who could have been this horseman? and what the meaning of his words? As you were stolen away on the night succeeding my desertion by your father, I had ever supposed—or hoped, rather—you had been taken away by him, and with him, wherever he went; and this hope proved my only comfort in affliction. But now I do not know what to think. This horseman could not have been your father, for the description is not at all like him. The latter was tall—dark complexioned, it is true—but with fine features and handsome person. And then he referred to your father, as knowing nothing of this dark transaction, and termed him a great chief in his own country, and said you were standing between him and fortune. What could he have meant by this last? Your father had no fortune to my knowledge, and mine was so fixed he could not get it. Ha! a thought strikes me. He was an exile from his native land—though for what he would never tell me, and would never speak of his early history. It is possible he may have been a personage of consequence, banished for some state intrigue, and again restored. It may be he had news of this when

he came to declare his intention of leaving me. And now I remember, he once intimated that he would some day be independent of me, though I did not know what was meant. This must be it!" she continued, as if soliloquizing; "this must be it! and this stranger, some fiend in human form, plotting to succeed him in wealth and station. Oh! the wickedness of all mankind! But I forget, my friends, you do not know of what I speak, as I have never told you my history."

"Nay, madam," returned I, "we know more than you think."

"Indeed! and how?"

Lilian blushed and I became embarrassed—for I felt I had, in my heedlessness, said a word too much.

"Pardon me," I returned, "and do not blame my informant! I must own I have heard the tale before. But you will not regret it, perhaps, when I say, that to this very knowledge you are partially, if not entirely, indebted for the presence of your long lost daughter."

"I blame no one," she answered, solemnly; "for all, in the hands of God, has worked for my good. I understand it all," she added, glancing at Lilian and Eva. "These tell-tale blushes reveal the truth. Eva told Lilian in confidence, and love wrung from her the secret. I am glad it is so. You are all my friends, and the tale by rights belongs to you. I might never have told it myself, unless on an occasion like this—for I do not care to have the cold, idle world speculating and jesting on the secrets of what has long been an unhappy, if not a wretched, heart. In my younger days I was headstrong and rash, and did many a wrong, as I have since felt to my cost—and might have done more, perhaps, but for my dear daughter Eva's sake. Ay! for her, I may say, I *lived*; for had she been taken from me, the grave ere this had covered a broken heart."

Her last words were said in a trembling voice and with deep emotion.

"God bless you, mother!" exclaimed Eva, in a tone which brought tears to the eyes of all present.

"He has blessed me, my child—blessed me beyond my deserts. Had I been what I should have been,

perchance your father had never left me, my daughters. But enough of this. It is past now—gone beyond recall—and the result is before us. But go on, dear Evaline—go on with your story !”

“Were I to tell the whole,” resumed the latter, “it would take me hours—nay, days—but that I shall not attempt to-night, only so far as relates to my earliest years and earliest impressions. In future I will give you more, little by little, until you receive the whole.

“As I have said previously, my earliest recollections are of Great Medicine and his tribe. I remember his dark, keen eye, and of his gazing upon me for hours, when none were by, and he thought I did not notice him. But I was older in thought than he was aware of ; and I used to wonder at this singularity, when he believed I wondered at nothing. I remember many and many a time of kneeling down to a spring of clear water, gazing at my features, and wondering why I was so different from my companions. I saw, even then, that my features were fairer and of an entirely different cast ; and this, to my young fancy, seemed most strange, as I believed myself of the same race as those around me. Great Medicine I then thought my father—for so he bade me call him, and so I did. As I grew older, this contrast, this difference in person, struck me more and more, and at last I made bold to interrogate the old man concerning it.

“Never shall I forget his look, as I, in childish simplicity, asked the question. He started, as if stung by a serpent, and his small, black eyes fastened upon mine as though to read my very soul. Never had I feared him till then. There was a wild fascination in that gaze, which thrilled and overawed me, and made my own seek the ground. Never shall I forget his words, as he advanced and took my hand. It was not so much what he said, as his impressive manner of saying it.

“‘Child,’ he replied, ‘you seek to know too much, and the knowledge you seek would render you in future years the most unhappy of mortals.’ Something I feel you must now know—and this it is : You are not of my race ; you are a pale-face ; I am your guardian. Seek

to know no more, for all is dark beyond. Be one of us, and be happy in ignorance. Breathe this I have told you to no mortal ear! and never, *never* question me again! You promise, girl?' he added.

" 'I do.'

" 'Enough! Go!'

"I left his presence a changed being, though he knew it not; for his strange language and manner had excited that eternal thirst for knowledge which he had thought and sought to allay. I questioned him no more; but his singular words I pondered in secret.

" 'There is mystery here,' I would repeat to myself; but I took care to repeat it to no other human being.

"To detail my strange conjectures from that time forth, would be to lay bare the secret workings of an ever active spirit. I shall not attempt it, but leave it to your imagination.

"About this period a few missionaries set up a temporary station near our locality, for the double purpose of making converts to their faith and imparting knowledge to the unenlightened Indians by teaching them to read and write. At the request of Great Medicine, three of their number came and took up their abode with us for the latter purpose. I was at once placed under their instruction, as were all the younger members of the village. On my first appearance before them, they seemed surprised, and questioned me regarding my name and parentage—at the same time expressing their belief I was not an Indian—or, at the most, only a half-breed. I replied, that as to myself they might conjecture what they pleased, but that I was not then at liberty to answer any questions, and there the subject dropped.

"A year's tuition and close application made me quite a scholar, and I could now read and write the English language quite fluently, as could several of the more intelligent of my companions. At the close of the period mentioned, our teachers, after presenting each of their pupils with a Bible, and distributing among us several other religious books, departed to another section of country.

"Soon after this, Great Medicine proposed that we

should adopt a more roving life, as in this manner he thought greater good might be effected. Accordingly we began moving from one quarter to another, trying to subdue the wild passions of the Indians of the different tribes we met. In this of course we were not in general successful—though our exemplary mode of life ever appeared to make a favorable impression on their savage hearts and win their respect. In course of time we became personally known in every section of the broad West, and were allowed to come and depart as we saw proper. Whenever we heard of a battle about to be fought between two nations, we would generally follow one party or the other, that we might be on the ground to succor the wounded. If we gained tidings of a strong party about to assault a weaker, we would manage, if possible, to warn the latter. Or, in the event of the forces being equal, if we knew of a surprise one tribe had planned for another, it was ever our design to warn the unwary. Whites as well as Indians received from us the same warnings—though how our information was obtained, generally remained a mystery to those not in the secret. And moreover, great caution was required by the informant in these cases, to avoid exposing himself to the aggressors, who, in the heat of passion, would be likely to seek revenge. On many of these errands of mercy—for I think I may so term them—have I been sent, when I knew a single error would cost me my life. But I believed I was doing my duty, put my trust in a Power above, and faltered not in my purpose. I was never detected but once to my knowledge; and in that instance, fortunately for me, I had rendered the tribe aggrieved the same service as that for which they brought me to trial before their council. This being proved, it was finally decided that the obligation on their part canceled the aggression on mine, and I was allowed to go free, with a very significant intimation, however, that if caught in the second offense my sentence would be death.

“But as I do not intend to enter into detail to-night, and as I already feel somewhat fatigued, I will drop my narrative here, and, as I said before, give you from time to time the most striking incidents of my life, as they oc-

cur to my recollection. I have briefly told you all I know of my early history, and by your leave will so end the story."

CHAPTER XXL

PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE.

"OOR child! my own sweet Evaline!" said Madame Mortimer, affectionately, as the former concluded; "what a singular life has been yours! and how much you must have suffered!"

"For which she shall be made happy the rest of her days," said Eva, springing to and imprinting a kiss on her lips.

"Ah!" chimed in Lilian, following the example of Eva; "did I not say we would love her as a sister?"

"Ay! but I had no idea you spoke so much truth, and in a double sense," rejoined Eva, glancing archly toward Charles. "I trust we may love her as a sister both!"

"Indeed you may!" chimed in I, laughing. "Eh! Charley?"

"Be quiet, I beg of you!" answered my friend, in some confusion; while Evaline hung her head with a blush, and a pleasant smile played over the faces of the rest of the group.

"And now, dear Evaline," said Madame Mortimer, "I suppose we may count on your spending the remainder of your days with us?"

Evaline seemed to muse seriously, but did not reply.

"Surely you do not hesitate, my child?"

"Why, to tell the truth," she answered, "I love the Indians, and know they will be loth to part with me."

"And has a mother no tie stronger than that of mere association?" rejoined the other, reproachfully.

Evaline looked up and her eyes filled with tears.

"Nay, mother," she said, "do not speak thus! Yes!" she exclaimed, suddenly rising, and throwing her arms around the other's neck: "yes, dear mother, I will go with you, even to the ends of the earth!—for I feel I could not part from you again. From my very childhood I have yearned for this happy moment—to hear the sweet voice of one I could call mother. It may be wrong to forsake my calling; but, if it be, I feel I must err; for I am only human after all, and cannot withstand the temptation of being with those I already love beyond all others I have ever seen."

"Bless you, Evaline, for these endearing words!"

"But I must return to them," she added—"I have promised that. I must return and bid them a last farewell."

"But where are you to find them, my child?"

"They will winter on the Black Hills, some sixty or seventy miles from Fort Laramie."

"And will they remain through the spring?" asked I.

"I cannot say. They *may* remain there through the summer, for all are particularly attached to the spot; and if any place can be called their home, it is the one in question."

"Then you can visit them on our way to the East; and should every thing be prosperous, we shall start as early in the spring as practicable."

"Oh, then we are to go East in earnest?" exclaimed Eva, clapping her hands for joy.

"Yes," I replied, "I am anxious to see home, and cannot think of leaving my friends behind me."

"Thank you for this welcome news!" she returned; "for I am already tired of the forest."

"But you do not regret having come here, Eva?" said her mother, inquiringly.

"Why, I have regretted it all along, till I found my sweet sister. Of course I cannot regret being made happy by her presence, which but for this journey had

probably never been. At the same time I am not the less anxious to return now and take her with me."

"And I," said Mrs. Huntly, "now that I am blessed with my children, begin to feel anxious to see my native land again, to there pass the remainder of my days, and take my final rest with those that have gone before me."

"God grant it may be long ere the latter event!" returned Charles, with feeling.

"Amen!" added I.

"It seems," observed Madame Mortimer, after some reflection, "as if Providence especially directed our steps hither; and it is the only way I can account for my anxiety to visit this part of the world, and thus expose myself and Eva to hardships and perils. What need had I to come westward? I had a handsome competence, and no ambition to be a pioneer; and yet something whispered me I must go. Truly, as I said before, God works in wonders!"

In like conversation an hour or two flew by, when the party broke up, and Madame Mortimer and her daughters were conducted by Huntly and myself to their own abode, which was close at hand, and the excitements of the day were soon by each forgotten in the pleasant dreams of the night.

Time rolled away pleasantly; and the third night after this, having retired at the usual hour and fallen into a sweet sleep, I was awakened by Huntly, whom I found pacing up and down the room, apparently in great excitement.

"Good heavens! what is the matter?" exclaimed I, rubbing open my eyes and starting up in bed.

"So, then, you are awake at last!" he replied, his eyes sparkling with what to me seemed unnatural fire. "Why, Frank, I was beginning to think you were taking your last long sleep, and that I might as well call to a wooden man. Come! up, now, and give me joy! It is all settled, my dear fellow—all settled!"

"Is it?" rejoined I, completely at a loss to comprehend what he meant; but somehow, in my sleepy confusion, mixing it up with a duel of which I had been

dreaming the night previous. "And so it is all settled, eh? Well, I am glad to hear it, Charley."

"I knew you would be," he replied; "and I awoke you on purpose to have you share my happiness. Come, give me your hand!"

"But how did you settle it, Charley?"

"Oh, I made bold to take up the matter at last and press it to a conclusion."

"And so you settled it?"

"Ay, and it is to come off at the same time as yours."

"As mine! But, my friend, I have no such affair on hand, to my knowledge."

"What!" exclaimed Huntly looking at me in astonishment. "Why, you have given me to understand all along that you had."

"I? No, you must be mistaken."

"Ha! then you have quarreled?"

"No! exactly the reverse. But you told me a moment since you had settled the whole matter, and now you say it is to come off with mine. Somehow I do not understand it. Either you or I must have made a mistake. When you said it was all settled, I supposed you to mean amicably settled; but I see now you simply referred to manner, time, and place. Well, at all events, I will stand by you to the last, though I sincerely regret the affair could not have ended without a meeting. Pistols or rifles, Charles?"

"Pistols or rifles!" he repeated, gazing at me with a peculiar expression. "Why, Frank, what do you mean by this strange language? or are you still asleep? In the name of all that is curious, pray tell me if you know yourself what you are talking about?"

"Why, fighting, of course."

"Fighting?"

"Ay, you were speaking of a duel, were you not?"

For a brief moment Huntly looked at me seriously, and then broke forth in a roar of laughter that fairly made the cabin tremble. It was some time ere he could command his voice sufficiently to make himself intelligible.

"Go to bed, Frank!" were his first words, as, half bent over, his hands clasping his sides, he stood gazing at me

with a comical look. "Go to bed, Frank, and dream yourself into a sensible fellow—for just now you are as wild as a night-hawk."

"But if you did not allude to a duel, Charley, pray tell me to what you did allude?"

"To matrimony—neither more nor less," he answered, laughing.

"Ha! I see it all now. Why, how stupid I must have been! But I was dreaming of a duel last night, and, being awakened so suddenly, and seeing you so excited, got completely bewildered. And so you have been *tête-à-tête* with Evaline, found your tongue at last, and said the sensible thing, eh?"

"Yes, and am now the happiest fellow living."

"You found it all right, did you, just as I said you would?"

"So far that I found she loved me, and had from the date of our first meeting; but that, believing herself a poor, nameless girl, she had avoided me, and striven in vain to crush her passion in the germ. Though she would have loved me, she said, to the exclusion of all others, even to the day of her death, yet, had matters not turned out as they have, she would most assuredly have refused my hand, though backed by all the eloquent pleadings of which the human tongue is master."

"Indeed would she!" I rejoined; "for such is her proud, noble nature. You remember our conversation years ago respecting her? My remark then was, if I mistake not, that, though she might love, she would reject you; and I gave, as one reason for it, that she was too noble minded to wed above herself. For what strange things have since transpired, you may thank your stars! You and I little dreamed then what the future had in store! Well! well! thank God, all has turned out for the best!"

"Ay, Frank," returned my friend, solemnly, "we may well thank God, and congratulate each other that we are here alive, after the thousand dangers to which we have been exposed!"

"And she accepted your hand?" I said, after a pause.

"She did, though not without much urging; for she

contended that even now she was but a simple, forest maiden, unused to the ways of civilization, and far my inferior in education, and said that I might aspire higher and be successful. But she loved—that was enough for me—and love and my pleadings at last overcame her scruples; and I left her with a lighter heart than I have known for many a long year.”

“Well, my friend, I sincerely congratulate you on the happy termination! And so, to speak plainly, your wedding is to come off with mine?”

“Even so.”

“Mine was to have come off on the day you returned; such were the conditions; but the day passed, as you know how; and as we are determined on going East in the spring, Lilian and I have thought best to defer it till we arrive at home. Ah! Charles, how that word thrills me! Home! Ah, me! how long since I have seen it! and who knows what disappointment and sorrow may be there in store for me! And how must my doting parents have mourned my long absence! Perchance they think me dead! Merciful Heaven! perchance they may be dead themselves! Oh, God! should such be the case——But, no! I will not, dare not, think so. I will hope for the best, and strive not to borrow trouble. It is enough to bear it when it comes. Come, my friend, to bed! for the thought of home has driven all others out of my mind, and I can talk no more to-night.”

CHAPTER XXII.

FINAL DEPARTURE.



It is when in sweet and constant communion with those we love that we forget the jars and discords of our past life, in the enrapturing harmony of the present. We then lose sight of the world as it is, and only behold it through that magic glass of inner joy which shows all its beauties and conceals its defects. These moments of earthly beatitude are most precious and evanescent. They are as so many golden sunbeams, streaming upon the otherwise gloomy path of the traveler, and showing him a thousand beauties, of whose existence so near him he had previously no conception.

Thus it was with myself and friends. Time rolled away almost unnoted, and ere we had prepared ourselves to bid old hoary-headed Winter adieu, we found to our surprise he had gone, and that light-footed Spring was gayly tripping and smiling in his place.

Although far in the wilderness, Oregon City was not without its attractions. Of the settlers, many were young people, who had been well brought up in the East, and had come hither to try their fortunes. They did not believe in renouncing all their former amusements; and, in consequence, gay parties, festivities, and balls, succeeded one another in rapid succession. To these myself and friends were always invited, and a number of them we attended. They were rude in comparison to some in the older settlements, it is true; but being in general conducted with great propriety, they often proved very agreeable pastimes, and enlivened the otherwise rather dull monotony of the village.

As spring advanced, we began gradually to prepare for our journey. The real estate previously purchased by Mrs. Huntly, was readily sold for cash, and the receipts doubled the purchase money. As we designed

taking nothing with us but what was absolutely necessary, the furniture of both Mrs. Huntly and Madame Mortimer was also disposed of—possession to be given as soon as the premises should be vacated.

As our party of itself was not strong, and as there were many here who designed going East—some to procure goods, some to remain, and others, who had come here in advance, to bring on their families—we decided to join them, and thus journey in comparative security.

Great was the delight of Lilian and Eva as the time drew near for our departure. In fact, toward the last, they could think of nothing, talk of nothing, but the pleasure of quitting their present abode, and of what they would do when they should safely arrive at their destination.

With Evaline it was different. In this journey she only saw a change of life and scene—(which, if truth must be told, she rather regretted than rejoiced at)—and a sad parting from her Indian friends. Where Lilian and Eva saw welcome faces and a thousand fascinations in the haunts of civilization, she beheld nothing but the cold gaze of strangers and the gossiping speculations of the worldly-minded. She was beautiful and fascinating in her personal appearance—refined, polished, and graceful in her manners—but, withal, so excessively modest as to underrate her own powers, and fancy herself an awkward forest maiden, unfitted for the society in which she was destined more or less to mingle. Both Charles and I, as also the others, ever strove to eradicate this unpleasant impression, and we in part succeeded; but still she was diffident, sober minded, and without a particle of that enthusiasm so strongly manifested by her sister and Lilian.

The Indian companions of Evaline had remained in the village through the winter; and by their quiet, unobtrusive manners, their steady, upright mode of life—so different from the drunken, brawling natives of the neighboring tribes, who occasionally visited the village—had won the respect and regard of the citizens, and, in fact, had become decided favorites with all. While the former were sought for, the latter were shunned; and

the widest distinction in all cases was ever drawn between the Wahsochees and their red brethren of other nations. But notwithstanding this partiality, the Wahsochees were evidently not contented in their present situation. To them, civilized customs had less attraction than the more rude and simple ones of their own tribe, and they were now anxious to depart and join their friends. It was arranged that all should proceed in company as far as Fort Laramie, whence Evaline could either accompany the Indians home, or let them go in advance to herald her approach, as circumstances might determine.

In enumerating the different personages who have figured in this narrative, I must not forget Teddy. For the last five or six months he had been in his glory ; and between taking care of our horses, spinning long yarns to the villagers, (whom, by the way, he ever succeeded in astonishing), and making love to Molly Stubbs, he had, as the phrase goes, had "his hands full." Of his success in the last, I must let the reader judge by the following colloquy, which took place between us a week or so previous to the time fixed on for our departure.

Approaching me with a rather timid step, hat in hand, and making a low obeisance, he said :

"The top of the morning to your honor."

"The same to you, Teddy."

"Sure, your honor—(a pause and a rapid twirl of the hat)—sure, and is it thrue ye're after taking yoursilf and frinds from these diggins (as the spalpeens call the likes) in a week for that mather?"

"All true, Teddy, nothing unforeseen preventin'."

"Troth! and ye'll be missed from this counthry when the likes of that happens."

"I trust so, Teddy."

Another pause, another twirl of the hat, and a scratching of the head. After some hesitation he proceeded :

"Sure, and it's me own mother's son, Teddy O'Lagherty, as 'ud like to be axing yees a question?"

"Well, Teddy, say on!"

"Faith! and it's mesilf as has been long in your honor's sarvice, now."

"Some three or four years, I believe, off and on."

"And it's not a bether masther I'd iver want, no it isn't."

"Well?"

"But ye 's a-going home, now, and maybe doesn't care for the likes of me iny longer?"

"I see: you wish to be discharged?"

Another twirl of the hat and scratch of the head.

"Why, now, your honor—no offence at all—but—but—to spaak the thruth, and make a claan breast of it, it's that same I'd ayther be axing for, or doubling the sarvice, jist."

"Doubling the service, Teddy? I do not understand you. You mean I must double your wages, eh?"

"Will, it's not exactly that—but—but—but—ye sae—(Here the hat fell to the ground, and Teddy made an unsuccessful effort to recover it,)—"Murther take the luck! but I'll say it now if I dies for it betimes! Ye sae, your honor, I've axed Molly, and it's all sittled, and there's a-going to be the pair of us, barring that the two counts one Scriptor-wise."

"So, so—I understand now—you are about to be married to Molly?"

"Why, yis, I may say that's the short way of saying the likes, your honor."

"Exactly; and unless I wish to employ you both, you desire to quit my service?"

"Troth! and your honor's a gintleman at guessing."

"Well, Teddy, as I have no use for Molly at this time, I will give you an honorable discharge, and a handsome wedding present for your valuable services besides."

"God bliss ye for a gintleman, ivery inch of yees! and it's meself as'll niver forgit ye in me prayers!" was the warm-hearted response, as, grasping my hand, he shook it heartily, while his eyes filled with joyful tears. "God bliss ye for a noble heart!" he added, as he turned away to communicate his success to her with whom his fortune was about to be linked.

Suffice it here, that I kept my word with Teddy, who

had no reason to regret having entered my service and secured my esteem.

The long wished for day of our departure came at last, and, being one of the brightest and most pleasant of the season, was hailed with delight as an omen of prosperity. Everything having been previously arranged, there was little to do but take leave of those who remained ; and this being soon over, we were on the move at an early hour, a goodly company of thirty souls, two-thirds of whom were of the sterner sex.

As much of importance is yet to be told, and as the reader has once or twice followed me over the ground now traversed, I will not trouble him with a detail of our journey from Oregon City to Fort Laramie.

Suffice, that we reached the latter place in safety, though much fatigued, about the middle of July, Anno Domini, 1844, and some four years subsequent to my former visit here, when I first beheld the beautiful Prairie Flower, otherwise Leni Leoti, now Evaline Mortimer, and soon to be—— But let me not anticipate.

CHAPTER XXIII.

FAREWELL TO THE MYSTERIOUS TRIBE.



O the great delight of Evaline, as well as of those who sympathized with her, it was ascertained, soon after our arrival at the fort, that some of the Mysterious Tribe had been seen quite recently in the vicinity ; from which we drew the conclusion that they were still at their winter quarters on the Black Hills. It being Evaline's desire to see them as soon as possible, it was finally arranged that her sister, Lilian, Charles and myself should bear her company, along with her Indian friends, while her

mother and Mrs. Huntly should await our return at the fort.

On learning our determination, some five or six of the party, with whom we had crossed the mountains, volunteered to go with us—a favor which we gladly accepted—as this would strengthen our party, and render us less liable to attack should we chance upon hostile savages. The rest of the company, after remaining over night at the fort, being anxious to proceed, bade us adieu, and resumed their journey on the morning following.

Before starting for the Black Hills, we procured a couple of tents for the ladies, which we packed on mules; and then, mounting each on a good horse, with all the necessary equipments for defense, we set forth on the second day at an early hour.

For a number of miles we made rapid progress; but at length we came to a rapid stream, with steep banks, which delayed us some time in seeking a place to ford. This crossed, we soon came to another where a similar delay awaited us. In short, our progress was so many times checked through the day, that when night at last began to draw her sable curtains, we found, to the best of our judgment, that hardly two-thirds of our journey had been gone over.

Selecting a pleasant spot, we pitched our tents, liberated our animals and encamped. An hour or two was passed in a very agreeable manner; when the ladies, who appeared more fatigued than we of the sterner sex, withdrew to their quarters, leaving the rest of us squatted around a large fire, which we had started, not to warm ourselves by, for it was a sultry July night, but to keep off the wild animals, of whose proximity we were several times reminded by dismal howls.

A little before midnight our animals were driven in and picketed, and a guard set, more from precaution than apprehension of danger. This done, the remainder of the party stretched themselves around the fire, and, with the exception of my friend and I, were soon in the enjoyment of that sweetest of all blessings, a sound and

healthful sleep. For some time I lay musing on the singular events of my life, and then turned to Huntly.

"Well, Charley," said I, "this seems like old times."

"So I have been thinking," he rejoined, "with one exception, Frank."

"The ladies, eh?"

"Exactly. I trust nothing may occur to make us regret their presence!" he added, seriously. "You and I have faced danger too often to fear it for our own sakes—but if anything should happen now——"

"Surely you do not dream of danger here?" I interrupted.

"Why, to tell you the truth, Frank," he replied, "I have my misgivings that we shall see trouble ere we again reach the fort."

"God forbid! What makes you think so?"

"I can give no reason. It is simply a presentiment of evil."

"But from what source do you apprehend danger?"

"From no particular one, Frank."

"Merely a fancy of yours, probably, springing from your intense interest in those more dear to you than life."

"God send it be only fancy!" he rejoined, gloomily.

His words made me sad, and, added to the restlessness I had previously felt, kept me awake a long time. At last I fell into a feverish slumber, and was gradually progressing toward a state of utter forgetfulness, when a snorting and stamping of the animals aroused me, and together with Huntly I sprang to my feet in alarm.

"What is it?" I said to the guard, whom I found standing near me, pale as death, with his rifle pointed in the direction whence came the disturbance.

"I do not know," he answered; "this is the first I have heard. Shall I give the alarm?"

"No! remain quiet a moment where you are, and I will steal in among the animals and ascertain the cause. I do not think it proceeds from savages, or we should have had an onset ere this."

"What then, Frank?" asked Huntly, taking his position by the tents, rifle in hand.

‘Most likely some wild beast, which, urged on by hunger, has ventured a little nearer than usual.’

My conjecture this time proved correct ; for on cautiously approaching the frightened animals, I discovered a small wolf in the act of gnawing a tether rope of buffalo hide. I could have shot him from where I stood ; but this I did not care to do, as it would only create unnecessary alarm. Retreating a few paces and selecting a good sized club, I informed the guard and Huntly that there was no cause for alarm ; and then returning with a stealthy pace, I got close to the hungry beast without making him aware of my presence. His head was from me, and he was eagerly engaged in getting a morsel to eke out a half-famished existence. I believe I could have killed the poor creature with a single blow, and I raised my club for the purpose ; but pity gained power over my resolution, and I gave him only a gentle tap, which rather scared than hurt him, and he ran away howling.

This little incident, though nothing in itself, tended to so increase the nervousness of both Huntly and myself, that we did not fall soundly asleep till the first sign of daybreak streamed up golden in the east. An hour later we werē all on our feet ; and having partaken of a slight repast, and laughed over our fears of the departed night, we mounted our horses and again proceeded on our journey.

No more delays occurred ; and ere the sun had gained the meridian, we came in sight of the village ; when our Indian companions, unable to restrain themselves longer, uttered shouts of delight and darted away in advance of us.

I turned to Evaline, and beheld her seated quietly on her little pony, her gaze riveted upon the village, but apparently laboring under no excitement. A closer scrutiny convinced me I was mistaken. There was little outward display of her feelings ; but I perceived, in her ashen cheeks and absent stare, that thoughts, mighty in their power, were stirring the soul within. For a short time she seemed unconscious of anything around her, and it was not until Eva had addressed her thrice that she received an answer to her question :

"Is this the spot, sister?"

On the second repetition, Evaline started, turned to the fair querist, and sighed :

"This is the spot."

Then covering her face with her hands, she remained silent until addressed again.

"Why are you so sad, Evaline?" inquired Lilian.

"Ay, sister, tell us !" added Eva.

"I am thinking of the past and the future," was the answer, in a low, tremulous tone. "Oh, my friends," she continued, "you cannot know my feelings. I am about to bid farewell to those who have been to me as brothers and sisters. I am about to leave—to see them no more—to go far away to the land of the stranger. True, you will say, I go not alone ; I shall have with me a kind mother and sister, and other dear friends ; but still you know not what it is to suddenly and utterly tear yourself away from old ties and old associations. You know not the fascinations of the wilderness, to one who, like myself, has never known anything else. Even danger has a charm to those who are bred to it ; and it is hard, with all the inducements before me, to break the spell of unlimited freedom with which I have roamed over thousands of miles of uncultivated territory. But I feel it my duty to go with you. I cannot think of parting from my dear mother again in life. As she has suggested, the tie binding me to her I acknowledge to be stronger than that of mere association."

"And have you no other inducement to part from the Mysterious Tribe?" asked Huntly, a little reproachfully.

Evaline looked up, her eye met his, a slight flush colored her pale features, and, frankly taking his hand, she replied, in a sweet, timid voice :

"Yes, dear Charles, there is more than one."

"God bless you, Evaline !" was the hearty response. "We will all strive to make you happy ; and, in the joy of the future, you will ere long forget the past."

"Forget, say you ?" she repeated, looking earnestly in his face. "Forget the past ? forget my old friends ? Nay," she continued, "you know not yet the heart of Prairie Flower if you think she can ever forget."

"No, no, not exactly forget," returned Huntly, endeavoring to recover from his mistake; "not exactly forget; I do not mean that, Evaline; but rather that you will cease to regret this change of life."

"Perhaps so," she sighed.

"See!" I exclaimed; "the Indians have nearly gained the village, and the inhabitants are already flocking down the hill to meet them. Let us quicken our pace;" and galloping forward, we soon drew rein in the center of the crowd.

"Leni Leoti!" "Prairie Flower!" was the universal cry on every hand, as Evaline leaped from her saddle and sprung to the embrace of her Indian friends, who pressed around her as children around a parent—old and young—men, women and children—each eager to be the first to greet her with a hearty welcome.

For some time the rest of us remained wholly unnoticed.

At length, the first joyful excitement over, Evaline pointed to us, and bade the Indians give us welcome, which they did in a hearty manner.

Approaching Eva, Evaline took her by the hand and said:

"In this lady, my friends, you behold the sister of Prairie Flower."

"Another Prairie Flower!" "Another Leni Leoti!" were the almost simultaneous exclamations; and instantly collecting around, they gazed upon her in surprise, and began talking to each other in their own dialect. Then, one after another, they approached and took her hand, and said that they were most happy to see her, and that she was welcome, as the sister of Prairie Flower, to a share in all they possessed.

This reception over, they invited us to the village, where everything in their power was done to make us comfortable and contented. Our animals were taken in charge and liberated, and three or four lodges assigned to us during our stay among them.

On learning that Evaline had only returned to bid them a final farewell, the Wahsochees one and all became very sad, and a gloom pervaded the village, as on

the funeral day of one universally beloved. The women and children wept at the thought, and some of them begged of her in piteous tones not to leave them. Evaline could not witness these sincere manifestations of lasting affection unmoved, and in consequence her eyes were continually filled with tears.

As it had been arranged that we should leave on the following morning, she was kept busy through the day in making preparations therefor. Her costume for different occasions, which had been procured for her by Great Medicine, and which she had preserved with great care, together with sundry other articles and trinkets, some of which she had purchased in Oregon City and brought with her, she now proceeded to distribute, one by one, giving something to each as a remembrance. This occupied her time and attention till night, when a conference of the nation was called, to which none of our party save herself was admitted.

At an early hour in the morning, our horses were caught and saddled, our two mules packed, and everything prepared for our immediate departure.

Evaline was silent and sad, and her features showed traces of having passed a feverish, restless night. Thinking she might feel a diffidence in having us present at her last interview, I approached her and said :

"Evaline, the time has come to take our final leave."

"I know it," she faltered.

"As there are some strangers in our party, perhaps it were better, all things considered, that we should go on before, and await your coming at a proper distance?"

"Thank you!" she replied; "the very favor I would have asked."

"There is a little hill you see yonder, somewhat out of the direct course to the fort, whither we will ride, merely for the view it affords of the prairie beyond, and there remain till you join us."

She again expressed her thanks, and I returned to the others and informed them of the new arrangement.

We then proceeded to shake hands with each of the tribe, which occupied us some ten minutes, and, mounting our horses, rode slowly away down the mountain,

crossed the little streamlet, and galloped over a short level to the hill in question, on whose summit we came to a halt as preconcerted.

It was a warm day, and the sun, about an hour above the horizon, streamed down his golden, mellow rays, beautifying each object, by giving it that soft and dreamy appearance, which, in the poetic mind, awakens those sweet fancies that fill the soul with holy meditation and make earth seem a paradise. A heavy dew had fallen during the night, and its crystalline drops, still hanging on leaf, blade, and flower, sparkled in the morning sunbeams like so many diamonds. Above us gay plumaged birds flitted from branch to branch, and poured forth their morning carols in a variety of strains, or, flapping their wings, darted up and away through the deep blue ether. Around and about us bees, beetles, and insects of divers kinds were buzzing, or basking in the sunlight, now dipping into the flower to sip its sweets, now alighting on the leaf to take a dainty morsel, now plunging to the ground with no apparent design, and then each and all up and away, filling the air with a drowsy, pleasing hum.

Not the least enchanting of all was the beautiful landscape that here lay spread to our view. Behind us was the little valley we had just crossed over, carpeted with green and variegated with bright flowers, through which wound a silvery streamlet, and beyond which, like some mighty barrier, the Black Hills lifted their heads far heavenward. To the right and left, at some little distance, was a wood, over the top of which loomed hills one above another, but gradually retreating, till the last one, far, far in the distance, either showed the fleecy-like palace of eternal snow, or gently blended with the cerulean blue.

But before us was the scene which fixed our whole attention. Here, for miles upon miles, stretched away a vast prairie, whose tall, rank grass, gently touched by a light breeze, undulated like the swelling of the sea in a calm, over which fluttered and hovered myriads of birds and insects, now dipping down, skimming along the surface and disappearing altogether, and anon soaring

upward, cleaving the balmy air, and displaying their little bodies as mere specks upon the blue background. To relieve the monotony otherwise attendant, here and there, at long intervals, rose little knolls, clustered with trees, resembling islands pushing up from the glassy surface of a tranquil ocean. And away, and away, and away to the dim distance, stretched this same sea-like prairie, till the eye, unable to trace it further, saw nothing but the soft blending of earth and sky.

For some moments we all remained silent, gazing upon the scene with feelings peculiar to each. Lilian was the first to speak :

"Oh, how beautiful !" she exclaimed, rapturously. "How beautiful and how sublime is this great ocean of earth !"

"Ay, sublime indeed !" rejoined Eva. "It is just such a scene as ever fills me with rapture—inspires me with the sacred feeling of poesy. Oh that, like one of those gay birds, I could wing my way above it ! Would it not be delightful, Lilian ?"

"Most delightful !" answered the other.

"But can we not skim its surface on our fleet steeds ? Come ! for a ride ! a ride ! What say you, gentlemen ?" she added, appealing to us.

"So pleasant a request, from so fair a petitioner, must needs be complied with," returned one of the party, gallantly, bowing gracefully to Eva.

The speaker was a young man, some twenty-five years of age, of fine person and good address, with a handsome and prepossessing countenance, whereon was legibly stamped frankness, generosity and nobleness of soul. There was an eloquence in his soft, dark eye, and a loftiness of purpose on his clear, open brow, which would have ranked him far above the many, had even a finished education, of which he was possessed, been wanting. To be brief in my remarks, he was the only son of one of the merchants who had emigrated from the State of New York to Oregon City during the previous summer, and one of the party who had so far been our companions of the long journey. He was now on his way East to arrange some unsettled affairs and purchase more goods

for his father, with the design of returning to Oregon the following season. During the past winter, Elmer Fitzgerald (so he was named) had once or twice met with Eva Mortimer; but no acquaintance had been formed with each other previous to both parties setting forth on the present journey. Being daily and hourly thrown together, sharing alike the hardships and perils of the wilderness, it was but natural that between two such individuals, of refined manners and cultivated tastes, there should gradually spring up an intimacy, which time and circumstances might ripen to something more.

As Elmer spoke, I noticed that both his own and the countenance of Eva slightly flushed; and quickly turning to me, the latter said:

"And what say you, Francis?"

"I shall echo the words of Mr. Fitzgerald."

"Then we will go!" said Lilian, joyfully. "But, brother," she added, turning to Charles, "you appear gloomy and dejected. Do you object to this arrangement?"

"Why, to speak candidly," he answered seriously, "I do."

"For what reason?" I inquired.

"I can give you no other than what I told you last night—a presentiment of danger."

"Pshaw, Charley," I rejoined, "there is no danger here! The sadness of Evaline has made you gloomy, and a brisk ride over this prairie will set you right again."

"And it will be beneficial to dear sister Evaline also," chimed in Eva, "by diverting her thoughts from her present cause of grief."

"Suit yourselves in the matter," rejoined Huntly. "I shall of course do as the rest. I merely spoke my apprehensions, which, after all, may only be foolish fancies."

"Lo! yonder Evaline comes!" cried Lilian; and looking toward the village, a part of which was visible from where we stood, we beheld her rapidly descending the mountain on her little pony.

Charles instantly wheeled his horse and rode away

to meet her, and presently returned in her company. She was sad and silent, and her eyes were red with weeping, while her features generally showed traces of having recently passed through a very trying scene.

On being informed of our present design, she silently acquiesced; and liberating our mules, that they might not suffer in our absence, we rode slowly down to the prairie, and set off at a gallop, most of us in gay spirits, with the understanding that, in case of becoming separated, we should all meet again at the starting point.

Man plans and God performs. That meeting, for some of the party, was destined never to take place.

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE PRAIRIE ON FIRE.

OR an hour or two we spurred on to the eastward, in company, through the tall grass, which brushed our feet at every step and made our horses labor exceedingly, when we came to one of the small hills or knolls previously mentioned, where we halted to give our panting and foaming steeds a few minutes' rest.

This knoll was clustered with beautiful trees, under whose refreshing shade bubbled up a spring of clear, cold water, with which we first refreshed ourselves and then our horses. From the brow of this, the view of everything was more delightful than from that of the one we had left behind us. Then we were looking on the prairie in only one or two directions—now we stood above and surveyed it on all sides. To the north of us was a small ridge, in shape resembling an ox-bow, the southern bend of which was about five miles distant. This, after running due north for a considerable distance, appeared to take a zig-zag course and unite with

the Black Hills, which, sublime in their grandeur, bounded the view to the west. To the south and east, as far as the eye could reach, stretched away and away the beautiful prairie, with nothing to relieve its monotony but an occasional knoll like the one on which we stood, and which forcibly reminded me of the oases I had seen in the great desert.

"Oh, this is delightful—enchanting!" exclaimed Eva, with a flush of animation. "This is what I love. It expands the soul, and bears one above the groveling thoughts of every day life. Nature," she added, apostrophizing, "I love thee in thy grandeur and thy simplicity! and know, as I gaze upon thee, that I behold the handiwork of that Great Power above, which regulates alike the mighty systems of ten thousand times ten thousand worlds and the most trifling event that takes place upon them. All alike move by a universal and immutable law; and each, as it were, complete in itself, is but a minor part of that great machine which works for one almighty and incomprehensible design. Were I a poet that could pen my thoughts, I would seek such a place as this, and, alone, away from the discords of my fellow beings, write such inspiring words, that ages yet to come should read and wonder over my pages and deem them the outpourings of a holy inspiration."

"Ay, sister," cried Evaline, "thus have I felt a thousand times; and thus it is I find it so hard for me to part from these enrapturing scenes. Now can you blame me for my regrets?"

"No, sweet sister," answered the other, "I do not blame you—far from it. I only feel you are a gem too rare to part with."

"And so think we all," I rejoined; "and one of us at least, if I may be permitted the expression, thinks doubly so;" and I glanced at my friend.

"Ay, Frank," he answered, "treble that if you like. But come, my friends, the day is advancing—had we not better return? They will look anxiously for us at the fort."

"One ride more first!" said Eva, quickly. "I cannot

bear to quit this scene forever without one more glorious ride."

"Whither shall it be, then?" asked Lilian.

"To yonder knoll;" and she pointed away to the eastward.

"That is far," rejoined Huntly, "and I fear we shall not get back till night, and the day will be lost."

"Lost?" echoed Eva, her eyes sparkling with animation. "Call you such a day as this lost? Come, gentlemen," she added, turning to the rest of us, "you do not think so, I'll wager! On! let us on! I dare you to a race! and my glove to him who first puts foot on yonder hill in advance of me."

So saying, she gracefully waved her hand, and, tightening her rein, pressed her fiery steed down the declivity and over the prairie at headlong speed.

"A race! a race! The glove! the glove!" cried some half a dozen voices: and instantly the whole party was in commotion.

Those who chanced to be dismounted, at once sprung to their saddles, and all dashed away after their fair champion, who, sitting erect, with the air of a queen, was now urging her gallant beast to do his utmost.

Next behind Eva rode Elmer Fitzgerald, striving hard to overtake her, followed by Lilian, myself, and the rest of the party, some in couples and others alone, each and all contending to be first at the far off goal. I say all, but I must except Charles and Evaline, who brought up the rear at a tardy pace, and seemed rather deliberately following us, without excitement and interest, than taking any part in the race.

With the rest of us, for the first five minutes, the contest appeared equal—neither gaining ground on the party, nor falling away from the position he had taken at the setting-out. All was life and excitement; and merry shouts and gay jests rung out, as we pressed our panting steeds through the tall grass, startling thousands of small animals from their quiet retreats, and scaring up flocks of birds, which, as they soared away, twittered their discontent, and looked down upon us with wonder and fear. On, on we rushed, completely

lost in the enlivening chase, and heeding nought but the still distant goal we were striving to gain. On, on! still on! with the fire of youthful ambition urging us to renewed exertions.

At length the difference in the speed of our horses began to be seen. Eva yet kept her position in advance, but was gradually losing ground before the fleetier steed of Elmer Fitzgerald. Lilian and I, side by side, still managed to hold our own, and were gaining on all the others, who were now strung out in a long, single line behind us.

Half an hour passed, and the change in our previous positions became more distinctly marked. Elmer now rode head-to-head with our fair leader, but both had increased the distance between themselves and us materially. I looked back, and beheld the line stretched out for more than half a mile, far beyond which I could dimly discern my friend and Evaline slowly bringing up the rear. Most of the party had by this time despaired of winning the race, had even withdrawn from the contest, and were now following at a leisurely pace. A few yet held on, but only for a few minutes, and then we were left masters of the field.

For another quarter of an hour we pushed on with vigor, when the panting of our foaming steeds warned us to check them. Elmer and Eva were the first to take this precaution; and, on our coming up to them, the latter said:

"I suppose, as we have distanced all the others, there will not be much strife between us. At all events, we must not kill our horses, and they are already pretty well blown. How much was I deceived in the distance! When I proposed this race, I had no idea there were more than five miles between point and point; and yet some eight or ten miles, if I greatly err not in judgment, have been gone over, and yonder hill is still miles ahead."

"Distance on level ground, from an elevated point, is always deceiving," I answered. "But come! I do not see the necessity of going further. Give your companion the glove, for I acknowledge him winner, and let us return."

"Pray take Mr. Leighton's advice, Miss Mortimer!" urged Fitzgerald; "for it is a long distance to where we left our mules, and our horses will suffer enough at the best."

"Ay, ay, modest sir!" exclaimed Eva, with a ringing laugh. "I understand. You wish to be acknowledged victor before you have won. By my faith, sir, I had thought you possessed of more spirit than that. I am willing to return, for that matter; but I cannot yield the glove until the conditions on which it was offered are complied with."

"Then the glove shall be mine, if I have to make the remainder of the journey alone!" cried Elmer. "Do not flatter yourself, Miss Mortimer, that I have exerted myself thus far for nothing. The prize I must have; I insist upon it; and it remains for you to say——"

"Good heavens! what is that?" exclaimed Lilian, interrupting the other, and pointing toward the south.

We all turned our eyes in the direction indicated, and beheld, stretching along the horizon, what appeared to be a dense, black, rolling cloud.

"A heavy thunder storm is approaching," said Fitzgerald in reply, "and we stand a fair chance of being thoroughly drenched."

"I think you are mistaken," rejoined I; "for I have never seen a cloud of such singular appearance. See! how it gradually creeps away to the right and left!"

"And there are bright flashes, too!" exclaimed Eva, breathless with intense excitement.

"What is it? what is it?" cried Lilian, grasping my arm with a trembling hand, and gazing upon the scene with a pale, terrified look. "It is not a cloud—it cannot be a cloud—it is something more awful. See! see! how fast it spreads! And there! there! mark you those flashes?"

Suddenly the whole horrible truth flashed upon me, and for the moment held me dumb with terror.

"You are pale with alarm!" pursued Lilian, turning to me and noting the agonized expression of my countenance.

"Speak, Francis! what is it?" cried Eva.

"Merciful God!" I gasped; "the prairie is on fire! We are lost!—our doom is sealed!"

"Lost?" shrieked Lilian and Eva.

"Oh, God! is there no escape?" added the latter, wildly. "We must—we must escape!"

"Flight—flight alone can save us!" shouted Fitzgerald. "Let us try for yonder hill! It is our only hope!"

As he spoke, he spurred his steed, struck Eva's with his bridle rein, and away bounded both with all the speed in their power.

"Follow!" cried I to Lilian, imitating the example of the other, and, in the wild excitement of the moment, completely losing all my wonted presence of mind. "Follow hard—strain every nerve—and God vouchsafe us victory!"

It was no longer a race of pleasure, but one of fearful agony—our lives the stake, and heavy odds against us. Can I describe it, reader?—describe our feelings in those awful moments of horrible suspense? No! it is beyond the strength of the pen—the power of language—and must be left to your imagination.

Four miles, at the least—four long and seemingly interminable miles—intervene between us and our destination. Can we reach it? We have but little hope. On, on we urge, with whip and spur, our already drooping horses—and on, on comes the mighty destroyer, as if sent to execute the long pent up vengeance of an offended God!

Away to the south, stretching from the east to the west, and rushing toward the north, with the fury of a devastating tornado, comes this terrific Avenger, sweeping all in his course; making all black and desolate which a few minutes since had seemed so lovely; rolling up to the very dome of Heaven his huge volumes of smoke, of gigantic and hideous shapes, with red sheets of flame issuing from its appalling blackness, as if they were the burning tongues and eyes of unchained demons, so shaped by our wild and distorted imaginations.

On! on!—how our horses snort, and foam, and tremble! They have caught our fears, and are doing

their utmost to save us and themselves! On! on! on!—two miles, thank God, are passed!—but, alas! there are two more before us, and our gallant beasts are already beginning to falter with fatigue! On! on!—behold our terrible foe advance! his fiery banners streaming up brighter, redder and still brighter, as he nears us!—his ten thousand scorching and blasting tongues, hissing, roaring and destroying every living thing that comes within their reach!

Oh! how sublime—how awfully sublime—this spectacle! on which we rivet our fascinated eyes; while our hearts leap to our throats, and our lips are compressed with an indescribable fear!

Now listen to those apparently unearthly sounds! The prairie is alive with millions of voices—which fancy would give to the fiery tongues of this rushing Monster, as the cheering song of his death-dealing advance—but which stern reality tells us are the frantic cries of droves and herds of wild animals, of all species, mad with affright, all pressing forward together, pell-mell, to escape one common, but ever conquering, enemy!

Look yonder! There goes a stampede of buffaloes. Yonder! Another of wild horses. How they tear ahead, with foaming mouths, expanded nostrils, dilated eyes, and a tread that makes the very earth tremble beneath them!

Look closer—nearer! Here—here they come!—above us, before us, behind us, beneath us—on all and every side—birds, beasts, reptiles and insects! How the animals dart athwart our course, now with lolling tongues, and fiery eyes half starting from their sockets, entangling the very legs of our horses, and causing them to rear, and plunge, and snort, and shriek with appalling terror!

God of Heaven! what a scene!

On! on! for our only hope! Another mile is passed; oh! that it were another—the last! We near the haven of our safety. Can we, shall we, ever reach it? Behold the Destroyer, where he comes! Up, up to the mid heaven now rolls the smoke of his conquest! and the sun

grows dark behind it, as if mourning for the destruction he is forced to look upon.

Hark ! what sound is that ?—that roaring sound ? It is the voice of the Fire-Fiend, mocking our hopes ! Must we die now, with safety almost within our grasp ? Why do our horses stagger and reel ? Have they not strength for this last effort ? See ! we are almost saved ! Yon hill looms up invitingly before us ! On ! for strength of another five minutes' duration ! Five minutes—only five—an eternity to us.

Ha ! the dense smoke is lowering upon us, and we shall be suffocated ! No ! that breeze drives it back ! All thanks to God for that ! There is still hope !

On ! on !—still on ! How swift is the flame, and how tardy our horses ! They have no spirit ! They only creep and crawl like snails ! My fortune all to hold out another two minutes !

Ha ! God help us now ! Lilian's steed reels—totters—stumbles—falls ! She is down ! I hear her shriek for help ! How strangely that shriek mingles with the roaring and crackling of this great prairie fire ! Now on my feet I seize her hand ! Now my horse staggers under a double weight ! But he is a gallant beast ; he bravely struggles to the last ; and plunging forward, with a dying effort, he falls at the base of the knoll, which Elmer and Eva have gained in advance of us. One desperate effort more, and Lilian, all unconscious of fear and danger, is borne in my arms into a dense thicket, where I sink upon the earth, and, half stifled with smoke, amid the roaring of a mighty conflagration, thank God its flames can neither reach me nor the being I love !

CHAPTER XXV.

PAINFUL SUSPENSE, GLOOM AND DREAD.



O tongue can portray my feelings, my deep emotions of gratitude to the All-wise Preserver, as, with the still unconscious Lilian reposing in my arms, I remained motionless a minute, enveloped in a pall of smoky darkness, listening to the roar of the awful flames, that surged around and onward, scorching the green leaves and grass within a few feet, but leaving me unharmed. Once, for a moment, when the smoke settled in so thick that day became night, and the air too much heated for respiration, I fancied we might die of suffocation. But it was only for a moment. A draught of wind revived me, and lifted the smoke, which rolled away in mighty masses after its master spirit, the devouring element; while daylight, again streaming in through the interwoven branches of this beautiful retreat, made my heart bound with rapture at our safe deliverance.

Lilian now opened her eyes, and for an instant gazed upon me with a bewildered expression. I strained her to my heart, pressed my lips to hers, and whispered:

"We are saved, dearest!"

"Saved?" she echoed: "Saved? Then it was not a horrible dream, but a frightfully hideous reality, at the thought of which the soul sickens and grows faint!"

"All that language has power to depict of the awful, it was, and a thousand times more!"

"Lilian! Francis!" now called the voice of Eva; and springing through the bushes, accompanied by Elmer, she rushed up to her fair friend, threw her arms around her neck, and each wept tears of joy in the other's embrace.

"But Evaline and Charles—what of them?" cried Eva, looking up, pale with alarm.

"Gracious God!" cried I; "what of them indeed!" for in the frantic bewilderment of the last few minutes,

all thought of everything but escape from death had been driven from my mind. "Perhaps they have perished! Great God! what a thought! To the brow of the hill led us speed at once!"

As I spoke, we all rushed up the acclivity, and soon gained a point whence we could gaze upon the desolated scene.

What a fearful change a few minutes had wrought! Where, a short time since, all was life and beauty—the tall grass softly undulating to the light-winged zephyr—we now beheld only a black, smoking, dismal waste, without a sign of living thing to relieve its gloom. The fire had passed us entirely; but away to the north, and stretching east and west as far as the eye could see, spread a dense cloud of rolling smoke, amid which we could perceive the lurid flashes of the death-dealing victor, as on, on he sped, seeking new victims to feed his insatiable maw. Here and there, in every direction on his smoking trail, were strewn the blackened carcasses of such animals as had been overtaken in their flight. At the foot of the hill whereon we stood, in the exact spot where he had fallen, lay the remains of the gallant beast which had borne me through so many perils, and which, at the very last, had saved my life at the expense of his own. A few rods further on was the one Lillian had ridden, now an ungainly mass of blackened flesh. Altogether, it was an appalling scene of desolation, that made the heart sick to look upon.

All these things I took in at a glance, but without dwelling upon them for a moment. One wild, maddening thought alone occupied my brain. My friend and Evaline—were they lost or saved? What a torturing uncertainty, where nothing could be known! I strained my eyes, and vainly strove to penetrate the sable veil which curtained the view to the north and west. All there was wrapped in the frightful gloom of impenetrable darkness. They might be living, but even now in the agonies of a most terrible death! and I groaned, and shuddered, and felt my brain grow dizzy and my heart sicken at the bare possibility.

For some minutes we all stood and stared as if rooted

to the spot, pale and speechless with the agony of suspense. At length the smoke began to clear away between us and the point from whence we had set out for the race. Alas ! it brought no hope, but rather despair. All, as elsewhere, was black and lifeless, and we felt our doubts removed by the worst of certainties.

"Oh, fatal day !" cried Eva, wringing her hands ; "and most fatal adventure ! Oh, God ! my sister and friend lost ! and all through my rashness ! Strong-headed and giddy, I would not heed his foreboding counsels, but madly rushed away, dragging him to his own death ! May God in his mercy forgive me ! for I can never forgive myself ! Never—no, never—shall I be happy again !"

"Nay, dearest Eva," said Lilian, consolingly, twining her arms around the other's neck ; "nay, my dear sister—for a sister to me you seem—do not reproach yourself thus ! You were to blame in this no more than I, or the rest. You knew not, dreamed not, there was danger—neither did any of us—and the forebodings of Charles were merely vague fancies without even a foundation. Had he warned us of certain danger known to himself then we might have been considered rash in disregarding his counsel. As it is, I feel we have been only the blind instruments in the hands of the Almighty for working out one of His mysterious designs. But do not let us despair ! I still have hope that Charles and Evaline are safe. They were far behind us, and it is possible may have turned back and gained yonder hill in safety."

"God send it be so !" ejaculated I, "though I have my fears. But, Eva," I added, "I insist you do not blame yourself ! If any one is to blame, it is I."

"You, Francis ? But you merely say this to console me."

"Nay, I will prove it. But for my plan, we should all ere this have been far on our way to Fort Laramie. It was I who proposed to Evaline that we should leave her alone with her friends, and designated the spot whither we would ride and await her. It was I that made light of the presentiment of Huntly, and scoffed at his idea of danger. So blame not yourself, Eva ! Heaven knows

the blow falls heavy enough upon us all, without the additional weight of either one thinking it the result of his or her individual misdoing."

"Ay," rejoined Elmer, "so think I. If one is to blame, all are—but, in my opinion, none are at fault; and certainly not you, Miss Mortimer."

But I will not follow in detail our gloomy conversation, nor longer dwell upon our feelings. Suffice, that for something like an hour we stood watching the fire, as on it rushed, away and away to the dim distance, leaving behind it the most dismal scene I had ever beheld.

Another hour passed, and still we stood in the self-same spot, uncertain what course to pursue. We had eagerly scanned every object, and strained our eyes in every direction, in the hope of being rejoiced by the sight of one living thing. But the hope proved fallacious. All was silent, and black, and motionless, on this great field of death and desolation.

But what should be done? was now the all important question! The earth was still smoking with heat; and the sun, in mid-heaven, was pouring down his scorching rays, with scarcely a reviving breath of air; so that we could not venture from our shady retreat with any safety. Besides, but two of our horses had been spared, and these were so exhausted as to be of no service to us for the day at least.

How long the earth would remain heated, we could not tell; but in all probability till the day should become too far advanced for us to gain another safe point ere nightfall; in which event we might again be in imminent danger from the ravenous beasts that might come with the darkness to prey upon the half-burnt carcasses of their fellows. In view of all this, there appeared no alternative but to remain where we were over night, and make the best of the circumstances we could not alter.

This, after the proposal, discussion and final rejection of several plans, was at last reluctantly consented to; when Elmer and myself immediately set about constructing a rude lodge for Lilian and Eva; who, to their praise be it said, bore their misfortunes with a firm,

patient and heroic resignation, that would have won our admiration, even had we in every other respect been wholly indifferent to their many noble charms.

Our present asylum was a beautiful and romantic spot, of some half a dozen acres in extent, watered by a fine spring, shaded with trees, and carpeted with a velvet-like sward of sweet, green grass, interspersed with white, red, purple, yellow and gold-colored flowers. In short, it seemed a Garden of Eden on an arid waste; and had our friends been with us, or even had we been assured of their safety, we could have spent the night here with pleasure.

With our hunting-knives we cut several withes; and then, bending down a few saplings, we bound them together so as to form a regular arbor, which we roofed over with bushes, leaves and turf, sufficient to keep off the dew at least. With our pistols, which we fortunately had with us, we pushed about through the bushes, and were successful in scaring up and shooting some two or three hares, which we dressed and cooked, and found very palatable—the more so, perhaps, that we had eaten nothing since morning—our provisions for the journey having been left with our mules.

During the day we saw nothing of our companions; and as night slowly shut in the scene, we gradually began to lose the faint hope that had thus far been our consolation. True, if saved, the same cause which prevented us, might also them, from venturing forth upon what seemed almost certain destruction. But there was no certainty—no, scarcely a possibility—that they had escaped; and this torturing thought, added to our lonely situation and the surrounding gloom, made us wretched with despair.

Oh! what an awful night was this we passed in the wilderness! One which, were we to live a thousand years, would ever be a yesterday to us, so deeply and painfully was it engraven upon the tablets of our memories! To add gloom, as it were, to accumulated horrors, a dark, angry cloud began to spread along the western horizon, from which shot vivid flashes of lightning, followed by the booming roar of heavy thunder, as if the spirits of the air, bent on making “assurance doubly

sure," were now marshaling their grand reserve-forces to triumph over a vanquished foe.

On, on came the Storm-King, flinging out his black banners in advance, and vailing the light of Heaven's starry host, as if unwilling one single thing should be left undone to make his triumph most dismally, impressively terrible! On, on he came, amid the almost incessant flashes and thunders of his mighty artillery!

Huddled together in our rude arbor, before which blazed a lurid, flickering flame, that gave our pale features an unearthly appearance, and made our grim shadows dance fantastically behind us, like dark spirits in a weird revel, we sat and gazed upon vacancy, silent with emotions too deep for utterance.

Now the storm was at its height. Sheet upon sheet of the hot lightning, flashing in our faces, blinded our eyes; peal upon peal of crashing thunder, shaking the earth beneath, almost deafened us with its roar; while the rain, pouring down in torrents, thoroughly drenched and stiffened our cramped up bodies and limbs.

For two hours thus we remained in breathless awe, motionless and silent, ere the storm abated its fury; and then only, as it were, that we might hear the howlings of surrounding wolves; which, to our distorted fancies, seemed the loud wailings of the damned over the final wreck of Nature.

Serenely the morning broke upon the night, and the sun again rose as bright and golden as if nothing had happened. Never was a day hailed with more joy. With the first streak of light we caught our two overriden horses, and found to our great delight that they were still capable of performing a heavy task. Mounting two on each, we set out over the blackened plain to retrace our steps, and if possible gain some tidings of our friends.

For an hour or more we saw nothing to attract particular attention; when suddenly Eva uttered a fearful shriek, and, pointing to an object before us, cried:

"My God! look on that!"

We did look, with dilated eyes, and felt our blood freeze with horror. It was the blackened and mangled corpse of a human being—probably the remains of one of

our companions of the previous day. A few feet from it lay the half-eaten carcass of a horse, too fatally confirming our suspicions.

Elmer and I dismounted and examined the body of the unfortunate young man; but all trace by which we might identify it was lost; and with a sickening shudder and trembling steps we passed on, with such feelings as none can ever more than faintly imagine.

About a mile from this we came upon the carcass of another horse, beside which lay the stirrups of a saddle, several scraps of burnt leather, and, oh God! another human body!

"Another victim!" groaned Fitzgerald, covering his eyes to shut out the hideous spectacle. "Who next?"

"Great God!" gasped I; "should the next be Charles and Evaline! But come, Fitzgerald! this is a trial unfitted for ladies. See! both Lilian and Eva seem ready to fall from their horses! Let us mount and away, and take them from this awful scene. If we gain no tidings of our friends when we reach the Wahsochees, we will at least get some of them to assist us in the painful task of searching for their remains."

Shaping our course more to the right, we rode away over the plain, fearful to look beneath our feet, lest our eyes might chance upon another revolting spectacle.

In the course of a couple of hours we had passed the first hill, leaving it away to our left, and were fast nearing the second, the point from whence we had first viewed the beautiful prairie, in all the enchantment of its loveliness, only the morning previous, and which we had fixed on for our rendezvous in case of becoming separated—little dreaming, in our merry thoughtlessness, of the mighty calamity hanging over us, and that grim Death, was even then invisibly stalking in our midst to select his victims.

Suddenly Lilian exclaimed:

"God be thanked! they live!" and, overcome with joyful emotions, she could only point her finger and faintly add: "See! see!"

"Ay, thank God," cried I, "they are saved!" and I pointed to Charles and Evaline, whom we now descried

rushing down the hill before us, followed by some fifteen or twenty of the Mysterious Tribe.

Five minutes later we stood clasping each other, weeping and speechless with joy.

CHAPTER XXVI.

HOME AT LAST.



It is unnecessary for me to dwell upon this rapturous meeting, one of the most joyful I had ever experienced. No one can conceive our feelings but such as have been placed in like situations. Each party had looked upon the other as dead, and mourned their loss accordingly, and it was with tears of gratitude, for our deliverance from an awful fate, that we narrated to each other the manner of escape.

That of Charles and Evaline was as follows :

At the time they discovered the fire they were some miles in our rear, and far behind the rest of the party. Made aware of their danger, they sought to avert it by flight ; and as the hill behind them was the nearest elevated point, they had striven to gain it in advance of the flames. In this they had been disappointed. The fire, driven by a strong breeze of its own creating, rushed forward with such frightful velocity, that, when within a mile or so of the desirable point, they found, to their dismay and horror, all hope of escape in that quarter cut off.

"Imagine my feelings," said Huntly, as he told me the tale, "when, all hope of escape over, I threw my arm around the waist of Evaline, and, pointing to the flames, which, driven forward by a strong breeze, had already passed the hill to the westward and were fast sweeping

around to enclose it with a fiery wall—when, I say, viewing all this, with the calmness of utter despair, I said :

“‘At least, dear Evaline, we will die together.’

“‘Rather say live together,’ she exclaimed, ‘if you have any means of striking fire.’

“‘Only a pistol,’ I replied.

“‘That will do,’ she answered. ‘Quick ! let us dismount, tear up the grass around us, and fire it.’

“In an instant,” pursued Huntly, “I comprehended all ; and springing from my horse, with hope renewed, I labored as a man may when his own life and that of another more precious are depending on his exertions. In two minutes a small spot was cleared ; and, placing my pistol within a bunch of torn up grass, I fired. The flash ignited it ; and a bright flame, shooting upward, caught on all sides, and sped away on its work of death, leaving a blackened circle, within which we stepped and remained unharmed. As soon as the fire had passed, we remounted and dashed over the heated earth to the hill before us, where, like yourselves, we passed a terrible night of agonized suspense. Not having seen any signs of you or the rest of the party during the day, we finally came to the melancholy conclusion that all were lost, and at daybreak this morning set off for the Indian village with the heart-rending intelligence. Some twenty of the tribe at once volunteered to go back with us ; and on this sad journey we had already set out, when, to our unspeakable joy, we espied you coming over the plain, and hastened to meet you.”

“Strange,” said I, in reply, “that I should have overlooked a means of escape so simple as firing the prairie ! It would have saved a world of trouble ; but from the first I lost my presence of mind, and thought of nothing but escape by flight. Alas for our companions ! Have you seen any of them, Charles ?”

“Not one,” he answered, with a sigh.

“Then I fear all have perished !”

“What are we to do under the circumstances ?” he inquired.

“Why, I think we had better set out for Fort Laramie

at once ; for our friends there, even now, are doubtless becoming exceedingly uneasy at our long absence."

"And leave the bones of our late companions to bleach on the open prairie, Frank?"

"No! We must get the Indians to hunt up their bodies and give them decent burial."

This plan was finally adopted ; and in the course of a couple of hours we had again parted from the Wah-sochees and were on our return to the fort.

The journey proved a tedious one, for all were sad and silent with gloomy thoughts. Traveling some thirty miles we encamped ; and resuming our route the next morning, we reached the fort in the afternoon of the same day.

As we rode into the area, the inmates all rushed out to greet and welcome us ; and among them came Mrs. Huntly and Madame Mortimer, almost frantic with joy. At first we were at a loss to comprehend the cause of this strong ebullition of feeling ; but we did not long remain in ignorance ; for the next moment, descriing two of our late companions in the crowd, the whole truth flashed upon us.

"Oh, my children! my children!" exclaimed Mrs. Huntly ; and overcome with her feelings, she could only first clasp one and then the other to her heart in silence.

"My daughters! and do I indeed see you alive again?" cried Madame Mortimer, pressing Eva and Evaline to her panting breast. "Oh! could you but know a mother's agony for the last twenty-four hours, during which she has mourned you as dead, you would never leave her again!"

But not to dwell upon this affectionate meeting, it will be only necessary to state, that two of the party, whom we supposed to be dead, had escaped, by flying from the field and taking refuge on the ridge to the north. Here they had paused for a few minutes, to gaze upon the sublime scene of the burning plain ; and then, believing all but themselves had perished, they had made the best of their way back to the fort and so reported. No wonder, then, that there was surprise and joy on beholding in us the dead alive—the lost found.

The second day following our return, we again set out on our homeward journey, in company with a small party of emigrants, who had recently crossed over the mountains from California.

For several days my friends and myself were unusually thoughtful and serious; but as we neared the confines of civilization, and felt we were about to quit the wilderness, with all its hardships and perils, to mingle with scenes more suited to our tastes, our spirits gradually grew buoyant with the seemingly unalloyed happiness of youthful days.

Never shall I forget the singular feelings we experienced—I speak of Huntly and myself—as we rode into the small town of Independence, Missouri, and recalled the many striking events of the long period which had intervened since last we had beheld the place. Then, giddy with the wildness of youth—alone—free from restraint—with no tie stronger than the filial to bind us to any one particular spot—we were just setting forth upon a new world of adventure! Now, sobered by painful experience, and in company with those we loved, we were retracing our steps, perfectly satisfied there was “no place like home,” and no scenes so dear to us as those of our native land. We had seen danger in every form, suffered all that we could suffer and live, had had our souls tried by the sternest tests, been miraculously preserved through all, been blessed beyond our deserts, and now felt contented to leave the field forever to such as might fancy it, and retire to the sweet seclusion of domestic life.

The countenance of Evaline, as day by day we progressed toward the East, gradually brightened with a sweeter happiness than she had ever known—the happiness of being with her mother and sister—of knowing she was not a nameless being, cast astray by some untoward freak of fortune—of feeling she loved and was in turn beloved. She was now entering a world where everything, opening up new and strange, filled her with wonder, excited her curiosity, and kept her in a continual state of pleased excitement. Eva was happy in the company of one who could appreciate her noble qualities,

and lend her those affectionate and tender sympathies which the ardent soul ever craves, and without which it languishes and droops and feels there is a depressing void within. Lilian was happy, and my vanity sometimes whispered me of a reason therefor. In sooth, by the time we reached St. Louis, there was not a sad heart in the party—unless, in a reflective mood, a dark shadow from the past might chance to sweep across it for a moment—only, as it were, to make it seem more bright in the glorious sunshine of the present.

With what emotions of wonder and joy did Evaline view those mighty leviathans, that, by the genius and mechanism of man, are made to ply upon the mighty rivers of the Great West, and bear him on his journey as he passes to and fro to all portions of the habitable globe! And then the delight we all felt, as we glided down the turbid waters of the great Mississippi, and steered up the beautiful Ohio, past villages, and towns, and cities, where the pleasing hum of civilization, in every breast save one, awoke sweet memories of former days, and made our hearts bound with pleasing anticipations of what was yet to come.

On, on we swept up the Ohio, past the flourishing cities of Louisville and Cincinnati (making only a short stay at each), to that of Pittsburgh, where our steamer was exchanged for the stage, to bear us over the romantic Alleghanies, and that in turn for the rushing car, to land us in Baltimore, again in Philadelphia, and lastly in that great emporium of the Western Continent, New York. And so on, on—ever-changing, continually progressing—toward the golden haven of our desires—which, Heaven be praised! we at last reached in safety.

During the latter part of the journey, my feelings became very sad. I was nearing the home of my youth—the abode of my dearly-loved parents—after many long years of painful and eventful separation. What changes might not have occurred in the interval!—changes, peradventure, to rend my heart with anguish! My parents—my affectionate mother—my kind and indulgent father—how I trembled to think of them! What if, as

in the case of my friends, one or both had been called from the scenes of earth, and were now sleeping their last sleep in the moldering church-yard—never to bless me more with the soft light of their benign eyes! Oh! what a heart-sickening feeling, of almost utter desolation, the very thought of it produced! until I forced myself to think no more, lest I should lack physical strength to bear me on to the knowledge I longed yet dreaded to gain.

Pressing invitations from us, and I scarcely need add a more eloquent persuasion from the soft, dark eyes of another, had induced Elmer Fitzgerald to extend his journey a few hundred miles beyond his original intention. Arrived in the city, we all took rooms at a hotel, until such time as we could notify our friends of our presence—or rather, until I could see my parents, if living, in advance of the others.

With a heart palpitating with hope and fear, I hurried into a carriage, and, ordering the driver not to spare his horses, leaned back on my seat, and gave myself up to the most intense and painful meditations—occasionally listening to the rumbling of the swift whirling wheels, and wondering when they would cease their motion at their present destination—or gazing from the window at the thousand objects flitting past me, with that vague look of the occupied mind which takes in each thing distinctly and yet seems to see nothing whatever.

“Crack went the whip, round went the wheels,” and on we sped at the same rapid pace. At length my attention was arrested by objects familiar from my boyhood, and my heart seemed to creep to my throat, for I knew I was close upon the mansion of my father. A few moments of breathless suspense, and the carriage stopped, suddenly, the door swung open, and, leaping out, I rushed up the steps, trembling in every limb.

Two minutes later, unannounced, I stood in the presence of my parents, but saw I was not recognized.

“Mother! father!” I cried; “have you forgotten your long absent son?”

There was a brief moment of speechless, joyful amaze-

ment, and the next I was in my mother's arms, while my father stood by, pressing my hand and weeping like a child.

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE CLOSING SCENES.



READER! I am about to close—about to present to you the last scene of scenes I shall ever give of this my drama of life. I am about to bid you farewell, perchance forever. May I not trust we part as friends?—as boon companions, who have together made a long pilgrimage, with an ever cordial attachment and friendly understanding? From the land of my nativity you have followed me through a period of years, over the wilderness of the far, Far West, back again to my native land. You have seen me in prosperity and adversity—in sickness and health—in moments of ease and safety—in moments of hardship and peril—in the calmness of quiet meditation, and amid the turmoil, and strife, and din of battle. From first to last I have been ever present to you—made you my confidant—laid bare to your gaze the secret workings of my ardent spirit. May I not trust I have had your sympathy? that you have felt an interest in my fate? and also in the fate of those with whom my fortune has been so closely connected? Yes! I will trust we part as friends—that when you have perused the last page of this, my humble scroll, you will not cast it aside as altogether worthless—that you will long after spare me and my friends a single thought of pleasing remembrance. I can not see you—can not hear your answer—and yet something whispers me it is as I desire—that we shall not separate but with mutual regrets. Be this as it may, the farewell must be said—the solemn farewell:

“That word which must be and hath been—
That sound which makes us linger.”

* * * * *

It was a brilliant scene. In a large saloon, made gorgeous with all the luxuries wealth could procure from all parts of the habitable globe—with soft carpets from Turkey, antique vases from China, old paintings from Germany, and statues from Florence—with long mirrors, that doubled the splendors of the scene—with chairs, and sofas, and ottomans, covered with the softest and most costly of velvets—with everything, in short, to please, dazzle, and fascinate the eye—over which streamed a soft, bewitching, alabaster light—where strains of melodious music stole sweetly upon the enraptured sense of the hearer : in such a gorgeous apartment as this, I say, were collected bright faces, sparkling eyes, snowy arms, and lovely forms—set off with vestures of the richest, costliest and most fashionable make—adorned with jewels of diamond, and ruby, and pearl, and sapphire : in such a place as this—in the mansion of my father—were assembled the élite of Boston, to witness the nuptials of Evaline and Charles, Eva and Elmer, Lilian and myself:

Need I dwell upon the scene? Need I say it was as happy as gorgeous? Need I add, that the fair maidens, led to the altar, looked more sweet and lovely than any had ever before seen them? No! it is unnecessary for me to enter into detail here, for the quick perception of the reader will divine all I would say. Enough, that the rough scenes of the wilderness, through which we had passed, could not be more strongly contrasted than on this never-to-be-forgotten occasion of unalloyed happiness.

The solemn nuptial rite was followed with congratulations—with music, dancing, and festivities—and it was long past the noon of night ere the well-pleased guests departed, and a small circle of happy friends were left to themselves.

When all had at last become quiet, and none were

present but the newly-married and their nearest and dearest relatives :

"Now," said Madame Mortimer, with a smile, "to add pleasure to pleasure—to make the happy happier—I have a joyful surprise for you all."

"Permit me to doubt," said I, "if aught any one can say, can in any degree add to the happiness of those here present. I look upon the thing as impossible."

"And yet," pursued the other, smiling archly, "would it not add pleasure even to you, Francis, were I to tell you that a dark mystery has been cleared up, and a wrong matter set right?"

"What mean you?" asked I, while the rest turned to her with eager curiosity.

"What would you think should I now proceed to prove to you, my friends, that the person you have long known as Madame Mortimer, is from this time forth to be known as the Marchioness of Lombardy?"

"How? what? speak!" exclaimed one and all in a breath.

"Yes, my dear friends, such is the fact. Since my return, I have received letters from England and France, stating that my late husband—for he is now dead—was none other than the Marquis of Lombardy, who was banished from France for some state intrigue, and afterward restored to favor. Fearing, before his death, that some future revolution might again endanger his property, he managed to dispose of sufficient to purchase a large estate in England, which he has generously bequeathed to me and my heirs forever. Accompanying his will, which I have now in my possession, is a long letter, in which he asks forgiveness for the wrong he had formerly done me in separation; and wherein he states, as a reason for never mentioning his title, that at some future time he had designed taking me by surprise; but that the news of the restoration of himself and fortune, coming at a moment when his worst passions were excited, he had left me in an abrupt manner, taking Evaline with him—who, he sorrowfully adds, was afterward lost or murdered; that of this foul deed he had always suspected a near relation of his—a villain who brought

him the intelligence of his fortune being restored—and that in consequence he had taken what precautions he could, to put his property, in case of his sudden decease, entirely beyond the other's reach. This, my friends, is all I will tell you to-night; but to-morrow you shall have proofs of all I have said. And now, my daughters, that you are happily wedded, I give you this estate as a marriage portion."

I will not dwell upon the emotions of joyful surprise which this revelation excited in the hearts of those who heard it. Suffice that it did add pleasure to pleasure—that it did make the happy happier.

A sentence more and I have done. The words of the Marchioness of Lombardy were subsequently verified in every particular; and Charles Huntly and Elmer Fitzgerald have had no cause, thus far, even in a pecuniary point of view, to regret the choice they made in the wilderness of the Far West. Propitious fortune now smiles upon all, and all are happy.

Thus is it ever. To-day we rise—to-morrow fall—to rise again perchance in the further time to come. Prosperity and adversity are ever so closely linked that the most trivial event may make or mar our happiness. The Past we know—the Present we see—but who shall say aught of the Future?

THE END.

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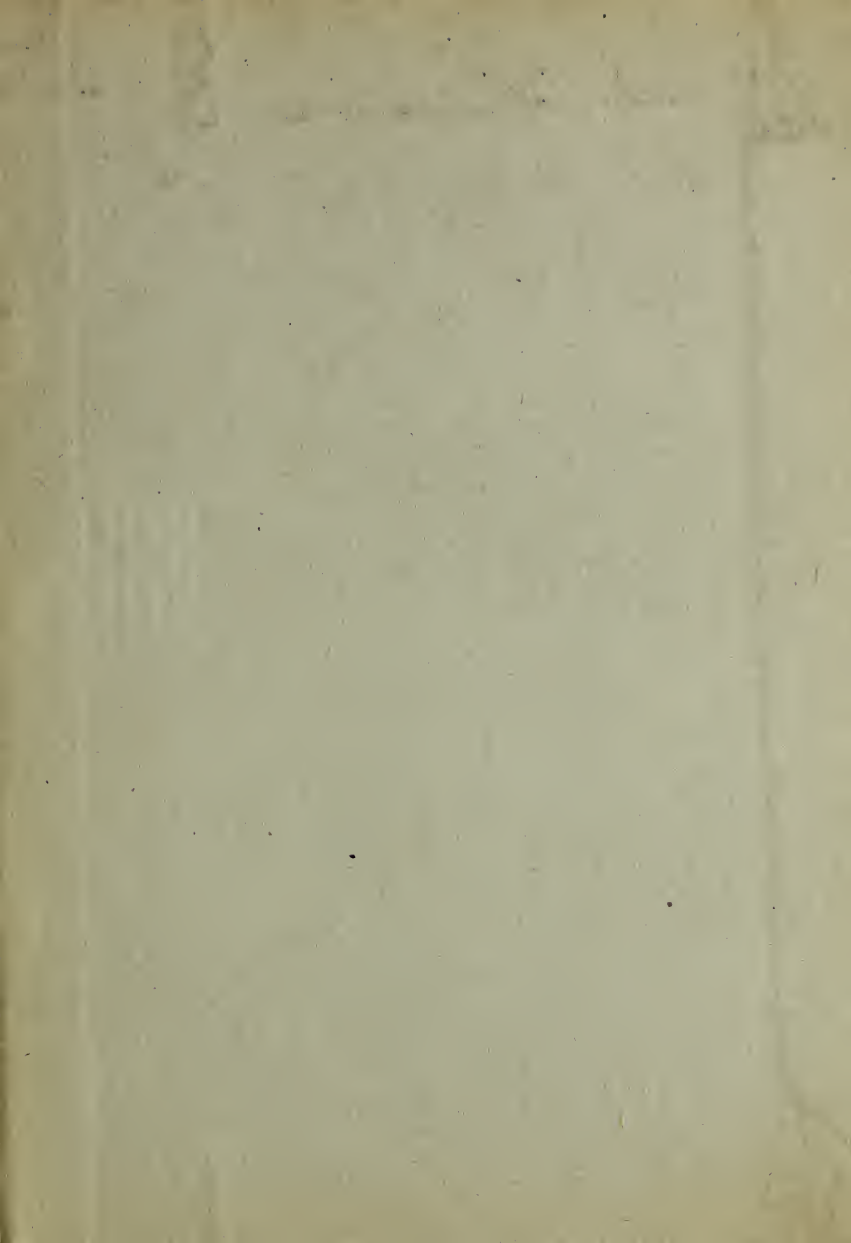
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